

THE INFLUENCE OF WALT WHITMAN  
ON SHERWOOD ANDERSON  
AND CARL SANDBURG

by

Viva Elizabeth Haught

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## The Influence of Walt Whitman on Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg



## Chapter I

### The Influence of Walt Whitman on Later American Poets

#### I

##### "I, Walt Whitman"

"The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."<sup>1</sup> So announced Walt Whitman to the "puritan" America of 1855 in his Preface to Leaves of Grass, and just so has he become one of the most far-reaching and stimulating poets of the so-called modern period. His finger-tips have pressed lightly or heavily, as the case might be, upon the hands of many "makers of Poems" who have

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<sup>1</sup>Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Inclusive Edition edited by Emory Holloway), New York, 1931, p.507. This volume is cited hereafter as Whitman, Leaves.



followed him. Many have been his acknowledged disciples; few have escaped him.

It is in this Preface to the 1855 edition of his single volume of verse that one finds the theories of this great poet and his self-assumed mission. He shall sing the glory of the United States, the equality of men and women, the cosmos, the individual, and the American language. In "Song of the Answerer" which also summarizes his theories, he declared that

The maker of poems settles  
justice, reality, immortality,  
His insight and power encircle  
things and the human race,  
He is the glory and extract thus  
far of things and of the  
human race.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman longed

Not for an embroiderer,  
(There will always be plenty of  
embroiderers, I welcome them  
also,)  
But for the fibre of things and  
for inherent men and women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.142.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.201. The excerpt is from "Myself and Mine."



He declared defiantly that the beauty of a poem does not lie in its rhyme, or decoration, or conventionalism of form, but in its expression of "all events and passions and scenes and persons some more and some less to bear on your [the reader's] individual character as you hear or read."<sup>4</sup> He carries this thought further in the "Song of the Answerer":

The words of the true poems  
give you more than poems,  
They give you to form for  
yourself poems, religions,  
politics, war, peace, be-  
havior, histories, essays,  
daily life, and every-  
thing else,  
They balance ranks, colors,  
races, creeds, and the  
sexes,  
They do not seek beauty, they  
are sought,  
Forever touching them or close  
upon them follows beauty,<sup>5</sup>  
longing, fain, love-sick.

He believed, too, in the physical as well as the spiritual manifestations of life; he sought to comprehend life as a whole, not discarding the things that, to others, had seemed commonplace and tawdry. The cosmos and the common were synonymous to him; he averred that he was an integral part of the most elemental things. The ordinary man to him was "the

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<sup>4</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.495.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.143.



divine average"; he exhorted the laborer to be proud of himself, for divine and eternal elements existed in him also. He was even capable of softening his "barbaric yawn" to express a religious lyrical rapture over a blade of grass.<sup>6</sup>

Whitman desired above all else to sing of life as it actually is, not as it idealistically might be. To him, the function of the poet was "to indicate the path between reality and their [men and women] souls."<sup>7</sup> He writes:

I swear to you the architects shall  
    appear without fail,  
I swear to you they will understand  
    you and justify you,  
The greatest among them shall be he  
    who best knows you, and encloses  
    all and is faithful to all,  
He and the rest shall not forget you,  
    they shall perceive that you are  
    not an iota less than they,  
You shall be fully glorified in them.<sup>8</sup>

Just how closely his literary descendants have followed his doctrine remains to be determined.

## II

### The Torch

This section has been subdivided under five headings--

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<sup>6</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.28, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.493.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.191, from "A Song of the Rolling Earth."



democracy, religion, sex, verse technique, conclusion--so that in each part a particular aspect of Whitman's influence upon certain American poets who followed him may be treated. Each division is considered as a separate unit in order to avoid confusion and to assure clarity.

#### A. Democracy

John Burroughs, friend and biographer of Whitman averred that

the reader who would get at the spirit and meaning of "Leaves of Grass" must remember that its animating principle, from first to last, is Democracy,--that it is a work conceived and carried forward in the spirit of the genius of humanity that is not in full career in the New World,--and that all things characteristically American (trades, tools, occupations, productions, characters, scenes) therefore have their places in it. It is intended to be a complete mirror of the times in which the life of the poet fell, and to show one master personality accepting, absorbing all and rising superior to it,--namely, the poet himself. Yet is it never Whitman that speaks so much as it is Democracy that speaks through him. He personifies the spirit of universal brotherhood, and in this character launches forth his "omnivorous words." What would seem colossal egotism, shameless confessions, or unworthy affiliations with low, rude persons, what would seem confounding good and bad, virtue and vice, etc., in Whitman the man, the citizen, but serves to illustrate the boundless compassion and saving power of



7

Whitman as the spokesman of ideal Democracy.<sup>9</sup>

To elucidate further Whitman's conception of democracy, let us examine an article by Henry Alonzo Myers, who expressed the belief that Whitman has been grossly misinterpreted. This critic declared that "Whitman remains, abroad and at home, the poet of political democracy and social freedom, the advocate of certain strange personal modes of behavior, in spite of the fact that a sober analysis of Leaves of Grass proves that the Whitman of 1855, convinced that he had a large mission to fulfill, brought to world literature a new and profound interpretation of life in terms of an inner, spiritual democracy."<sup>10</sup> He considered Whitman as the interpreter of this "inner, spiritual democracy" rather than an outer, materialistic one, as the majority of critics believed him to be. Mr. Myers wrote that "the importance of the inner world to Whitman is apparent in the fact that he has gone beyond the middle of the 1855 preface before he turns aside to discuss, as a secondary topic, political liberty and equality. It is made further apparent when we note the contrast between the just equality of men proclaimed as an eternal law in his poetry and the political inequality discovered by his sober

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<sup>9</sup>John Burroughs, Whitman: a Study, New York, 1901, pp.80-81.

<sup>10</sup>Henry Alonzo Myers, "Whitman's Conception of the Spiritual Democracy, 1855-1856," in American Literature, vi (1934), 239.



and critical analysis of the American experiment in Democratic Vistas.<sup>11</sup> This critic declared finally that Whitman's "affirmation of all things grasped as manifestations of eternal justice" was the poet's medium for an interpretation of life in terms of this inner, spiritual democracy.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, Whitman's scope could not be rivalled by later poets; yet each of them has played his part in presenting some particular phase of democracy. Although Joaquin Miller did pose and exaggerate, as Louis Untermeyer accused,<sup>13</sup> his poem, "Columbus," has been called by Fred Lewis Pattee the greatest single poem of the period. In it, all the lustiness of splendid manhood is manifest as in Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Pattee deemed Miller a great humanitarian whose "voice was heard wherever there was oppression or national wrong."<sup>14</sup>

But it was Edwin Markham who really voiced "the good gray poet's" sentiments. An indirect quotation from the New York Times indicates that his poem "The Man with the Hoe" was the first definite crystallization of Whitman's message in

<sup>11</sup> Myers, "Whitman's Conception," p.243.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.251.

<sup>13</sup> See Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry: a Critical Anthology, New York [1925], p.9 (Third revised edition).

<sup>14</sup> Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature since 1870, New York, 1915, p.110.



our poetry.<sup>15</sup>

In "Gloucester Moors" and "The Brute" by William Vaughn Moody was revealed a passion for human and industrial justice. The first poem celebrated leisure, self-control, and enjoyment of nature as the rights of the laborers; the second celebrated the steam-shovel.<sup>16</sup> To digress somewhat, one might well compare his idea of evolution, "the aspiring impulse within all life which makes it rise not through struggle against outer forces so much as through the innate impulse to develop"<sup>17</sup> with Whitman's treatment of it in "Song of Myself."<sup>18</sup> In Moody's "An Ode in Time of Hesitation," in which he bitterly resented America's war policy toward other nations, is found an interesting reference to Whitman as "the strong spirit."<sup>19</sup>

And how very unusual to find that the apparently cold and remote Edwin Arlington Robinson possessed, according to one critic, such a great love for men that he spent half of every year in New York City so that he might mingle with the

<sup>15</sup> See William L. Stidger, Edwin Markham, New York [1933], p.128.

<sup>16</sup> See Norman Foerster, American Poetry and Prose: a Book of Readings, 1607-1916, New York [1925], pp.916-918.

<sup>17</sup> Percy H. Boynton, A History of American Literature, New York [1919], p.459.

<sup>18</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.68-69.

<sup>19</sup> William Vaughn Moody, Poems, Boston and New York, 1902, p.18.



large crowds, just as Whitman mingled with them during his Bohemian days.<sup>20</sup>

Clement Wood, on the other hand, found in this poet "nothing of the cosmic sweep of Whitman, no ecstatic vista of the human comedy or tragedy, depending on which side of the cloud you observe, much less anything of the vaster tragic-comedy of which 'the drifting mote called man' is so small a part."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps, however, it might not be too dangerous to hint a likeness of character delineation--or rather lack of it--in Whitman and Robinson. Neither writer gave any "physical embodiment" to his characters and neither has any "local color" or background. Both wrote of the "spirit of man"; they differed in that Robinson's style, like his people, was "dominantly intellectual," while Whitman's manner was emotional.<sup>22</sup>

We find, however, that none of Whitman's disciples and interpreters could do more than reiterate weakly what he had said far more powerfully. Only James Oppenheim, whose origins may be found in Whitman and whose poetry protested against the stolidity and indifference of the common man and railed against the world because of its duplicities yet lived it just the same, thoroughly imbedded Whitman's visions in his own

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Evans, "Edwin Arlington Robinson," in The Bookman, lxxv (1932), 675.

<sup>21</sup> Clement Wood, Poets of America, New York [1925], p.122.

<sup>22</sup> For a further discussion of this subject, see Percy H. Boynton's article, "American Authors of To-day," in The English Journal, xi (1922), 383-391.



poetry.<sup>23</sup>

But it was Carl Sandburg about whom Whitman might have written: "The greatest among them [the architects or poets] shall be he who best knows you, and encloses all and is faithful to all."<sup>24</sup> We discover that "both Whitman and Sandburg looked about them and wrote. They wrote of common men, laboring men, little men as well as big men, of mud and smoke and steel; they wrote of towns in which they lived, towns where there was filth, towns that were filled with elbowing humanity; they wrote of the country where farmers and woodsmen lived, where there were growing crops and rolling prairies and mighty trees. They wrote of life as they found it, not of life as they dreamed it. They used no veneer. They were true to 'the here and now.'"<sup>25</sup>

Other critics felt that Sandburg came directly out of the tradition left by Whitman but that he seemed to be closer to the common people than was his predecessor.<sup>26</sup> Although he realized the wretched aspect of social injustice, Sandburg,

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<sup>23</sup> Louis Untermeyer, The New Era in American Poetry, New York, 1919, pp.42-56.

<sup>24</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.191.

<sup>25</sup> Esther Lolita Holcomb, "Whitman and Sandburg," in The English Journal, xvii (1928), 550.

<sup>26</sup> See Horace Gregory's article, "Our Writers and the Democratic Myth," in The Bookman, lxxv (1932), 377-382 and John Macy's article, "The New Age of American Poetry," in Current History, xxxv (1932), 555-556.



like Whitman, was buoyed up by supreme confidence in the future:

I speak of new cities and new people.  
 I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.  
 I tell you yesterday is a wind gone  
 down, a sun dropped in the west.  
 I tell you there is nothing in the  
 world only an ocean of to-morrow,  
 a sky of to-morrows.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Sandburg's attitude toward democracy seemed to differ from Whitman's in that he claimed material opportunities rather than spiritual.<sup>28</sup>

The Vagabondia Books composed by Richard Hovey and Bliss Carman carried the Whitmanic note, with the influence of "Song of the Open Road" apparent in the opening lines of Hovey's poem, "Spring":

I said in my heart, "I am sick of four  
 walls and a ceiling.  
 I have need of the sky,  
 I have business with the grass.  
 I will up and get me away where the  
 hawk is wheeling,  
 Lone and high,  
 And the slow clouds go by."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Carl Sandburg, Cornhuskers, New York, 1918, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> See the article by Edgar Lee Masters, "The Poetry Revival of 1914," in The American Mercury, xxvi (1932), 279.

<sup>29</sup> Foerster, American Literature, p.902.



John Hall Wheelock's volume, The Human Fantasy, concluded with an acclamation to all living and inanimate things.<sup>30</sup>

True it is, then, that

Leaves of Grass, historically, prophetically and as a work of art, is of major significance. It is not that Whitman in some 14,000 lines, some of them amazingly beautiful poetry, some of them dull prose, announces a definite independence from Europe and the emergence of the American race, visioned by him but yet to be; nor is it that he broke the Puritan hush over sex at a time when it was personally dangerous to do so; nor that he added a form to poetry; it is that he surprises the secret of the American soul in such a way as to give an American the experience of that secret.<sup>31</sup>

#### B. Religion

But it was not this wider aspect of democracy which alone concerned Whitman, for the very heart of Leaves of Grass is religion; a tiny blade of grass is sufficient to dismay an atheist. There is, indeed, a deep as well as surface resemblance of these chants to the Scriptures of Isaiah or Job, for it was Whitman's purpose to present a personal account

<sup>30</sup> See James Cappon, Bliss Carman, New York and Montreal [1930], pp.60-61; Untermeyer, The New Era, p.230. See Appendix A, p.142, for letter from Wheelock to the writer of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> John Macy, American Writers on American Literature, New York [1931], p.260-261. This excerpt is from the chapter entitled "Whitman" by James Oppenheim.



of his moral and religious conception of life.<sup>32</sup> Whitman believed that poetry would increasingly do the work of religion and that the succeeding test of poetry would be its religious character. The "Song of Myself" is a complete expression of his belief in the perfect unity of matter and spirit with all the spiritual significance it involves. With these views in mind let us trace their development along the high-marks of later American poetry.

Though at first glance apparently little similarity is seen between Joaquin Miller and Walt Whitman, a closer observation discovers a likeness in spirit and in thought. We find the former concerned with the fundamentals of human life, imitating the naturalism and mysticism of Whitman as closely as his flamboyant temperament would permit.<sup>33</sup>

Some years later appears Bliss Carman with a mystical tendency overshadowed by transcendentalism. Like Whitman, he too attempted to discover a practical means of expression for his emotions: "the great question for him was to find a supreme expression for this transcendental form of vision, an embodiment of it significant enough perhaps to stand as a new poetic interpretation of life."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Havelock Ellis, The New Spirit, New York [1926], p.109.

<sup>33</sup> See Pattee, A History of American Literature since 1870, p.110.

<sup>34</sup> Cappon, Bliss Carman, p.36.



Another, who, like Carman, was not an admirer of Whitman's form and not an experimenter in free verse, but who did have the "cosmic imagination" was Moody. The editor of Some Letters of William Vaughn Moody marks the latter's

intimate sense of personal presence, the generous nature that has expressed this religion of humanity with incomparable power in Raphael's hymn to man in Act III of the "Masque of Judgment." Deeply spiritual, and as far as possible removed from the sensualism the thoughtless have found in it, is his paganism, as there set forth, his belief in the feelings, the passions, and the senses. He conceives them all as ministers of spirituality, and sees them transfigured in that ministration. He believes that through them alone is spirituality realized, or realizable.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously, here is another accused of inappropriate dealing with sex. Like Whitman again, "Moody saw in evil not exactly the implacable foe of good, but rather its twin brother, bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh, since both good and evil are children of passion and will."<sup>36</sup> Focus this explanation upon "Song of Myself," "Children of Adam," "A Song of Joys" and notice the perfect alignment of subject matter.

And so the pageant continued with Frost's quiet acceptance of God's presence, with Lindsay's almost savage interest

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, Some Letters of William Vaughn Moody, New York, 1913, p. xxvii.

<sup>36</sup> Charlton M. Lewis, "William Vaughn Moody," in The Yale Review, 11 (1913), 691.



in external phases of religion, with Sandburg's "barbaric yawp" against "bunkshooters" and his realistic "Grass," with Oppenheim's Biblical Songs for the New Age and his long symbolic poem, "The Sea," and his poems on Whitman and Lincoln, and with Wheelock's The Human Fantasy and The Belover Adventure, both filled with spiritual intensity buoyantly singing "Splendid it is to live and glorious to die."

### C. Sex

But the phase of Whitman's writing which has caused a great deal of dissension among critics is his treatment of sex. To him the soul and the body were synonymous; both were divine. "I am the poet of the Body, and I am the poet of the Soul," he acclaimed, and

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word  
En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone  
is worthy for the Muse,  
I say the Form complete is worthier  
far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse,  
and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action form'd  
under the laws divine,  
The Modern Man I sing.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.1.



He dared to discuss love and lust, soul and body in the same breath. He used sexual imagery as a symbol for mystical, religious experiences. Vulgarity was far from his intention, for to him every part of the body was divine--"the man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred." He did not preach the "free-love" cult, however; indeed, that was farthest from his thought. He desired, even urged, that men and women face life in all of its inclusiveness with decent thinking, candid minds and cease corrupting themselves with indecent thoughts of passion.

Joaquin Miller, like Whitman, had no aversion to sex or to nakedness but regarded both as natural and pure. In him may be traced, as in Whitman, sincere belief in the ultimate purity of natural love and passion.

Moody attempted to employ sexual imagery in his deeply spiritual poetic dramas much as Whitman had done in "Song of Myself" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."<sup>38</sup> To him the only possible attitude toward life was its vigorous acceptance. He ardently believed one should live life to its fullest extent.<sup>39</sup> His poem, "I Am the Woman," was a Whitman-like study of woman's place in society; he made her elemental, sensual, yet spiritual.

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<sup>38</sup> Mason, Some Letters, p. xxvii.

<sup>39</sup> See ibid., p. xxviii.



Wheeler's philosophy, likewise, was that of Leaves of Grass. In The Human Fantasy he "rejoices in 'the dear, sensual Fact of things,'" speaks of "'the clear reality of life, filled with laughter and eternal strength,'" hails

The carnal buoyance and the common  
sense  
of sane and sensual humanity.<sup>40</sup>

The advent of Edgar Lee Masters with his Spoon River Anthology created a controversy as remarkable as the furore raised over Leaves of Grass. The former was, perhaps, "a reply to Leaves of Grass from the viewpoint of those Children of Adam whose engendering has been blighted and whose days gangrened by their 'democratic' environment."<sup>41</sup> This Anthology paid more attention to passion and lust than most critics preferred. The frankness of Whitman was quite evident in these poems, which acknowledged and descended upon hypocrisy, hate, greed, and lust in village life.<sup>42</sup>

Sandburg's treatment of sex carried more suggestiveness than frankness. A comparison of Whitman's "Children of Adam" with Sandburg's "Circles of Doors" from Smoke and Steel (1921)

<sup>40</sup> See Untermeyer, The New Era, p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> John Cowper Powys, "Edgar Lee Masters," in The Bookman, lxix (1929), 654.

<sup>42</sup> For a further discussion see the article by Percy H. Boynton, "The Voice of Chicago: Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg," in The English Journal, xi (1922), 610-620.



disclosed the latter's appeal to the imagination rather than to the senses. Both Masters and Sandburg desired more liberal ethical freedom. Both disapproved of "puritan" repression and desired free play for the emotions.<sup>43</sup>

#### D. Verse Technique

Turning from subject matter to versification, we find Whitman's influence significant. He attempted to fit his verse to the thoughts which he wished to express; consequently, traditional verse forms did not suit his purpose.<sup>44</sup> Examination of his poetry reveals that his verse is composed in lines, not in sentences. The accumulative effect of these lines is that of a chant. It is interesting that Amy Lowell believed that Whitman wrote in his peculiar form through ignorance rather than design. She wrote that he had not the slightest idea what cadence really meant and had very little rhythmical sense. The moderns, she believed, owed very little to his form; yet they did owe to him an attitude.<sup>45</sup>

With the "poetry revival" of 1914 came the so-called "free verse," imagism, realism, and all the other "isms" growing out of a revolt against stilted phrases and sentimentality.

<sup>43</sup> Boynton, "Voice of Chicago," xi, 610-620.

<sup>44</sup> See Cappon, Bliss Carman, pp. 313 passim.

<sup>45</sup> Amy Lowell, Poetry and Poets, New York, 1930, pp. 61-87.



The Imagists carried out Whitman's plea for the exact word and the common language.<sup>46</sup>

One of the most important products of Whitman's propagating spirit was Sandburg, who captured the "good, gray poet's" very voice in many of his poems, so that distinction between them if read aloud is often difficult. Both used comparatively unfamiliar rhythms; both employed unfamiliar words, while Sandburg used slang vociferously. The catalogues found in the latter's poem, "The Sins of Kalamazoo," may be likened to those in Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Long sentences and reiterations characterize the poetry of both writers.<sup>47</sup>

#### E. Conclusion

It is evident, then, that critics agreed, as far as they go, concerning Whitman's influence on the subject matter and verse form of later American writers. Their findings indicated that Whitman's theories of democracy, religion, sex, and verse technique carried over into the productions of many writers who followed him. But the critics have been literary rather than scholarly, so that the validity of their decisions may or may not be valid or sound. Few attempts at definite

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<sup>46</sup> Boynton, "Voice of Chicago," in The English Journal, xi (1922), 610-620.

<sup>47</sup> Paul L. Benjamin, "A Poet of the Common-Place," in The Survey, xliv (1920), 12-13.



parallelisms have been made; consequently, there still remains the task of making a critical and careful examination of twentieth century poetry and prose to determine the extent and depth of Whitman's effect upon them. In the two chapters which follow an attempt has been made to show the relation of Whitman to Sherwood Anderson and to Carl Sandburg. The parallels which have been used are presented in an endeavor to indicate possible connections of content and form between Whitman and these two writers. The facts are presented as accurately as possible, but no attempt has been made to prove the actual degree of influence, as only the apparent degree may be determined in any case.



## Chapter II

### Walt Whitman and Sherwood Anderson

#### I

##### American Criticisms of Anderson

Although Sherwood Anderson had already published two books, Windy McPherson's Son (1916) and Marching Men (1917), it was not until the printing of Mid-American Chants in 1918 that critics noticed him. Louis Untermeyer, writing for a current periodical, remarked that "even a casual reading of these loosely written chants reveals how frequently the author has forced his note and how much of his utterance is indebted to Whitman and the idiom of Sandburg."<sup>48</sup> He illustrates his point by this quotation:

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<sup>48</sup> Louis Untermeyer, "A Novelist Turned Prophet," in The Dial, lxiv (1918), 484.



Song to the Sap

In my breast the sap of spring,  
 In my brain grey winter, bleak and hard,  
 Through my whole being, surging strong  
     and sure,  
 The call of gods,  
 The forward push of mystery and of life.

Men, sweaty men, who walk on frozen roads,  
 Or stand and listen by the factory door,  
 Look up, men!  
 Stand hard!  
 On winds the gods sweep down.

In denser shadows by the factory walls,  
 In my old cornfields, broken where the  
     cattle roam,  
 The shadow of the face of God falls down.

From all of Mid-America a prayer,  
 To newer, braver gods, to dawns and days,  
 To truth and cleaner, braver life we come.  
 Lift up a song,  
 My sweaty men,  
 Lift up a song.<sup>49</sup>

Mr. Untermeyer cites, as a second example, this excerpt from "one of the finest rhapsodies":

I am pregnant with song. My body  
 aches but do not betray me. I will  
 sing songs and hide them away, I  
 will tear them into bits and throw  
 them in the street. The streets  
 of my city are full of dark holes.  
 I will hide my songs in the holes  
 of the streets.

In the darkness of the night I awoke  
 and the bands that bind me were  
 broken. I was determined to bring

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<sup>49</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Mid-American Chants, New York, and London, 1918, p. 51.



old things into the land of the new.  
A sacred vessel I found and ran with  
it into the fields, into the long  
fields where the corn rustles.

All of the people of my time were bound  
with chains. They had forgotten  
the long fields and the standing  
corn. They had forgotten the west  
winds.

Into the cities my people had gathered.  
They had become dizzy with words.  
Words had choked them. They could  
not breathe.<sup>50</sup>

Mr. Untermeyer, however, made no attempt to parallel these  
passages with any particular ones in either Whitman or Sand-  
burg.

Another reviewer, Thomas Walsh, asserted that in these  
so-called chants "one finds a rather apocalyptic expression  
given to the untutored boast of an egotism based upon half-  
education and half-culture. It is honest expletive for the  
most part rather than singing...."<sup>51</sup>

In 1919 H. W. Boynton compared the American realism<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Untermeyer, op. cit., p.484. The excerpt is from Ander-  
son's Chants, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Walsh, "Poets, Rose Fever and Other Seasonal Mani-  
festations," in The Bookman, xlvi (1918), 641-643. Compare  
this criticism with that of Cappon in his Bliss Carman, pp.313  
passim, in which he maintains that Whitman attempted to fit  
his verse to the ideas which he desired to express and in which  
he treats of the colossal egotism of Whitman as well.

<sup>52</sup> See H. W. Boynton, "All over the Lot," in The Bookman,  
xlix (1919), 728-734.



of Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio with that of Edgar Lee Masters's Spoon River Anthology, called by John Cowper Powys "a reply to Leaves of Grass."<sup>53</sup>

Two years later Robert Morse Lovett, in a review of Poor White (1920), stated that "Mr. Anderson's formula is realism, enlarged and made significant by symbolism,"<sup>54</sup> a formula which might very well be applied to Whitman, who is certainly a realist and who uses sex images for symbolical purposes.

The following year Paul Rosenfield eloquently described Anderson's vocabulary as being "of the simplest folk; words of a printer, a copy-book quotidianness, form a surface as hard as that of pungent fresh-planed boards of pine and oak";<sup>55</sup> and it was Whitman who wrote An American Primer, in which he admonished the writer to use the simple words. The critic further says that "we know ourselves in Anderson as we know ourselves in Whitman. He is about the job of creating us, freeing us by giving us consciousness of selves."<sup>56</sup> Continuing, he states: "What happened to Whitman, decay for want of

<sup>53</sup> John Cowper Powys, "Edgar Lee Masters," in The Bookman, lxix (1929), 654. This thought is supplemented by Percy H. Boynton's article, "Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg," in The English Journal, xi (1922), 610-620.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Morse Lovett, "Mr. Sherwood Anderson's America," in The Dial, lxx (1921), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Rosenfield, "Sherwood Anderson," in The Dial, lxxii (1922), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.38.



comprehension, was not to happen to him. He was afoot to so remain."<sup>57</sup>

In 1923 Alyse Gregory made a criticism of Anderson applicable to Whitman: "Yet it is at the command of a voice that one finds oneself proceeding--a voice exhorting, suppliant, prophetic, simulating stridency, sentimentalizing, and dwindling or recurring moments to a bewildered whisper of inquiry."<sup>58</sup>

Ludwig Lewisohn during the same year in a review of Many Marriages (1922) voiced the Whitman theories of democracy, sex, and nature as being a vital part of Anderson's work.<sup>59</sup>

Later, Arthur Kellogg in an article printed in The Survey alleged that Anderson, in the main, was concerned with the common man whose "soul" is all important and whose life is directed by his environment.<sup>60</sup>

Dealing with the same theme, Louis Bromfield, reviewing A Story Teller's Story (1924), felt that Anderson disclosed not only himself but the ideals, the emotions, and the thoughts

<sup>57</sup> Rosenfield, "Anderson," p.41.

<sup>58</sup> Alyse Gregory, "Sherwood Anderson," in The Dial, lxxv (1923), 243.

<sup>59</sup> See L. L. (Ludwig Lewisohn), "Novelist and Prophet," in The Nation, cxvi (1923), 368. Compare Whitman's theory of democracy, of sex, of religion as found in Democratic Vistas and Other Papers, London and Toronto, 1888, p.1 *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Kellogg, "Telling Tales on Life," in The Survey, liii (1924), 288.



of his fellow-men, who belong to the working class.<sup>61</sup> Whitman's Leaves of Grass is a manifestation of this same theory.

Joseph Collins, on the other hand, examining the same book, found no such material. To him, Anderson's so-called Freudian psychology was boresome, and the writer's habit of becoming "hypnotized by high-sounding words" displeased him. He regretted that Anderson had not read Fielding and Chekhov instead of Whitman and Clemens.<sup>62</sup>

Joseph Wood Krutch, however, considered that Anderson was at his best when he used "Whitmanesque prose-poems"<sup>63</sup> though vagueness of thought marked his works.

But Stuart P. Sherman wrote in 1926 that "another of his [Anderson's] gifts is that he is tremendously American and proud of it. He is no booster or braggart, save in the purely

<sup>61</sup> Louis Bromfield, "Introspection and Retrospection," in The Bookman, lx (1924), 492. See John Burrough's Whitman, New York, 1901, pp. 80-81 for a discussion of Whitman's democracy. To him, Whitman is the personification of "universal brotherhood." See also Henry Alonzo Myers's article, "Whitman's Conception of the Spiritual Democracy," in American Literature, vi (1934), 241-242.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Collins, "The Doctor Looks at Biography," in The Bookman, lxi (1925), 24. It is interesting to note that in October, 1924, Robert Morsa Lovett wrote: "Mr. Anderson is of all American writers most like Chekhov, whose method it was to start from some fortuitous concurrence of characters of forces and drift with the human stream, impartially and disinterestedly, letting nature have its way, in full surrender to the current of reality. And Chekhov wrote no novels" ("Sherwood Anderson," in The English Journal, xiii (1924), 537).

<sup>63</sup> See Joseph Wood Krutch's article, "Vagabonds," in The Nation, cxxi (1925), 627.



Whitmanian sense. Like Whitman, he is too profoundly conscious of all that is vile and shoddy and vicious and sodden and ugly in the American scene. But in his moments of elation he, too, feels that, with all his imperfections on his head, and with all the roily turbulence within, he is 'the typical American' of our day.<sup>64</sup>

The year 1927 saw the publication of the three following books: A New Testament by Sherwood Anderson, The Phenomenon of Sherwood Anderson by N. Bryllion Fagin, and Sherwood Anderson by Cleveland B. Chase. The first volume will be treated in Section III of this chapter. The second publication concerned itself primarily with Anderson's rise to fame and contained critical analyses of his works. Of the poems, Fagin said: "They are the homely rhapsodic exclamations of simple people close to the objects that stimulate their senses. They constitute perhaps the closest approach to the kind of indigenous poetry that Walt Whitman dreamed of."<sup>65</sup> He continued:

The realist, the mystic, the prophet, even the reformer insist on being heard along with the poet. In his Mid-American Chants the poet had the best of it. He chants of "The Corn-fields," of "Industrial America," of "The Beginning of Courage," of "Manhattan," of "Spring," of "Planting," of "The Middle World," of "Stephen the Westerner," of "The Lost Ones," of

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<sup>64</sup> Stuart P. Sherman, Critical Woodcuts, New York, 1926, p.12.

<sup>65</sup> N. Bryllion Fagin, The Phenomenon of Sherwood Anderson, Baltimore, 1927, p.143.



"Dark Nights," of "The Mating Time," of "The Soul of Chicago," reminiscent though they were of the Whitmanic stride, were full of sensuous pictures and music.<sup>66</sup>

Chase in his study of Anderson concerned himself little with critical estimates. He remarked that Anderson's chants were "unlike his usual prose; they are not essays; they very patently echo many of Walt Whitman's thoughts; they attempt to recapture the rhythm of certain passages from the Old Testament; and they bear evidence to a lyrical urge on the author's part."<sup>67</sup> He later stated that Anderson's earlier writings owed much to Whitman's ideas concerning America,<sup>68</sup> and noted: "Anderson needs to be saved from a cheap, soft sentimentality that distorts and castrates everything he writes."<sup>69</sup> The same criticism may be made of Whitman whose "So Long," "O Magnet-South," and "The Centenarian's Story" are permeated with just such sentimentality.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Fagin, The Phenomenon of Sherwood Anderson, p.147.

<sup>67</sup> Cleveland B. Chase, Sherwood Anderson, New York, 1927, p.67. The rhythm of Whitman's poetry has been compared with that found in parts of the Old Testament: see Bliss Perry's Walt Whitman: His Life and Work, Boston and New York, 1906, pp.96 and 283 and Gay W. Allen's article, "Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman's Proseody," in Revue Anglo-Américaine, ix. 11-12 (1933), 490-507.

<sup>68</sup> Chase, Anderson, p.83.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>70</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.416-419, 393-394, 250-254.



Another critic, Percy H. Boynton, in the volume More Contemporary Americans, observed: "...to the friendly and unshocked observer he does seem to be somewhat Whitmanic in his keeping his hat on indoors or out and sounding his barbaric yawn over the roofs of the world, or raising the roof it he happens to be in the bedroom beneath the eaves."<sup>71</sup>

In a short article in The New Republic, however, Lawrence S. Morris, discussing the highlights of Anderson's career, remarked: "Intellectually he was guided by one idea: that what is natural is sweet and that it is only pretense which sours life. The world is soiling its emotions by being ashamed of them, he thought."<sup>72</sup> Turning to his style in writing, Morris averred that Anderson in his later works became obsessed by words, so that he came to express "unreal emotions in unreal words" and forgot to remember the principles involved in their use.<sup>73</sup>

Hamish Miles, reviewing A New Testament (1927), deplored its style, declaring that its comparison with Whitman's Leaves

<sup>71</sup> Percy H. Boynton, More Contemporary Americans, New York, 1927, p.167.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence S. Morris, "Sherwood Anderson: Sick of Words," in The New Republic, 11 (1927), 277. See Emory Holloway's article, "Whitman as a Critic of America," in Studies in Philology, xx (1923), 345-369, which holds that Whitman believed man to be fundamentally good and averred he should cease defiling himself by impure thoughts of passion.

<sup>73</sup> Morris, "Anderson," ibid., 11, 278. It is interesting to note that Whitman called himself a "word-fellow" and imported such words as "Libertad," "Camerado," "Eleve," "Philosophus."



of Grass would leave no doubt in the reader's mind which came from "an inner flame, which only from an inner fever."<sup>74</sup>

In 1928 T. K. Whipple, of the University of California, published his book Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life, in which he discussed Anderson at some length. He concluded that

since, as he [Anderson] says, he has no God, Anderson's is a nature-mysticism much like Whitman's. He advocates a return to a simpler and more primitive way of life, to the condition of savages and even of beasts and plants. In his first novel he wrote:

American men and women have not learned to be clean and noble and natural, like their forests and their wide, clean plains.

This point of view is at the root of his affection and admiration for horses and negroes; it recurs again and again in his stories, and explains his choice of title for his novel Dark Laughter. Hence comes his hatred of the intellect, as a dividing, separating force which will not let man "just be, like a horse or a dog or a bird." That is why he usually joins "dry" and "sterile" with "intellectual." As a character in The Triumph of the Egg exclaims:

What makes you want to read about life?  
What makes people want to think about life?  
Why don't they live? Why don't they leave  
books and thoughts and schools alone?

Even one who holds that the intellect need not be an impoverishing factor in experience and that to

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<sup>74</sup> Hamish Miles, "From an Inner Fever," in The Saturday Review of Literature, iv (1927), 86. Amy Lowell has said: "To follow him [Whitman] is merely to imitate the pattern of his cloak" (Poetry and Poets, p.87).



live like the animals is neither a feasible nor a desirable solution of the human problem may still concede that it would be better to live so than not to live at all, and be grateful to Anderson for the emphasis he lays on the importance of living.<sup>75</sup>

In the same year Régis Michand, lecturer at the Sorbonne in 1926 and winner of the Montyon prize bestowed by the French Academy, published his lectures in book form. Concerning Whitman and Anderson he said:

Few American authors, since Whitman, have taken literature as seriously or have conceded it as being on so high a level of mysticism as Sherwood Anderson. I mention Whitman advisedly in connection with Anderson. His influence over the younger American writers is manifest. Was he not the first to emphasize the bio-chemical element, and to find lyrical inspiration in it? Dreiser's hymns to the Vital Force, his paeans to physiology, as well as his tragic sense of everyday life, bear Whitman's imprint unmistakably. Sherwood Anderson owes him still more. sensualism and mysticism blend in his prose as they do in Whitman's poems. In the words of both of them we hear simultaneously the whispers of heavenly death and the somber droning of the Erdgeist. Both of them have given heed to what Emerson called the demonic. Both have brought the soul and the body into magic and sensuous contact. The poetry of the one and the poetic prose of the other seem to come from an embrace in which the spiritual and the material still coalesce. Modern as they are in many respects, the stamp of primitivism is on them. In Anderson's novels, man, like the cosmos in "Leaves of Grass," has not yet been disengaged from that

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T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life, New York, 1928, pp.134-135. The "first novel" referred to is Windy McPherson's Son (1916).



amorphous clay kneaded by the gods. He still finds himself in a nebulous state, half-way between himself and animal.

"Mid-American Chants" are authentic grafts budding from "Leaves of Grass."<sup>76</sup>

In the same volume in a chapter entitled "Anderson on This Side of Freud," Michaud remarked:

After Rousseau, Walt Whitman has tried the gospel of sexual sincerity at all cost. He had attempted to call the universe to him and hold it in his naked arms. "I Walt Whitman, a cosmos!" and it all ended in failure.... But Anderson is a poet. Like Whitman he worships Life and the Vital Force. He wants us to surrender to all beautiful instincts. Society denies us this right, Life itself will build a bridge to greater freedom.<sup>77</sup>

With the year 1929 came the opinion of a critic that Anderson's popularity was waning.<sup>78</sup> It seemed to her that he was entirely too concerned with himself, too lacking in interpretative imagination. This writer remarked that "one hears that he has lifted American idiom from the status of mere slang and made it 'art.' He has, it is true, given a certain Homeric quality to the idiom of the factory, the race course, and the

<sup>76</sup>

Régis Michaud, The American Novel To-day: a Social and Psychological Study, Boston, 1928, pp.154-155.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.195.

<sup>78</sup>

Rachel Smith, "Sherwood Anderson: Some Entirely Arbitrary Reactions," in The Sewanee Review, xxxvii (1929), 159-163.



pool room; but unfortunately, it is no longer American slang. Vigorous still and ungrammatical, but Andersonized beyond recognition."<sup>79</sup>

After declaring that Anderson was not successful with his language, this critic condemned his mysticism, maintaining that Anderson, though writing of God, could not forget himself. She found also his verse to contain a few lines of great lyrical beauty, which, it is true, are nearly hidden by page after page of vagueness and obscurity.<sup>80</sup>

The years from 1930 to 1933, inclusive, showed a noticeable dearth in publications dealing intensively with Anderson. In 1930 Pattee mentioned his "Whitman-like chants"<sup>81</sup> and Parrington's The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: 1860-1920 merely summarized Anderson's stories, but manuscript evidence indicated the critic's intention to analyze, an intention which was forestalled by the latter's death.<sup>82</sup> Three years later Granville Hicks concerned himself with Anderson only so far as the latter might be matched with Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis in his treatment of American life.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Smith, "Sherwood Anderson," p.162. See Cappon's chapter on "The Tradition of Emerson and Whitman in American Literature," in Bliss Carman, pp.279-280, for a discussion of Whitman's style and expression.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp.162-163.

<sup>81</sup> Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature: 1890-1930, New York [1930], p.337.

<sup>82</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: 1860-1920, New York [1930], pp.370-371.

<sup>83</sup> Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition: an Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War, New York [1933], pp.231-6.



In 1934 Anderson was criticized in a chapter entitled "Broken Face Gargoyles"<sup>84</sup> by Harry Hartwick, who saw both Dreiser and Anderson despising morality, desiring a "return to Nature," considering "the cosmos as an inherent mixture," hating "standardization in ethics and industry," placing "their faith in instinct," and confessing themselves "absolutely bewildered by life."<sup>85</sup> He said that "Anderson resembles Whitman gone to seed, or a bacchic St. Francis of Assisi, with his lush nonsense about a 'sweeter brotherhood,' 'virgins,' the 'soft lips' of men and women on his hands, and his spiritual orgasms."<sup>86</sup> He devoted a moment to Anderson's poetry, in which he accused it of "smelling powerfully of Sandburg and Whitman."<sup>87</sup>

That many other criticisms of Sherwood Anderson have been made from 1918 to 1935 goes without saying; however, only those which link Anderson with Whitman have been included in this section. An interesting fact to note, moreover, is that the majority of critics connecting these two writers wrote over a period of four years: 1924-1927. During this time ten of the twenty-four critical analyses appeared, five being printed in 1927 alone, a phenomenon which might be explained by the rapidity

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<sup>84</sup> Harry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction, New York (1934), pp.111-150.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.113.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.120.



with which Anderson was turning out work and by the increased interest in "natural" subjects.

That the critics vary in their estimate of Anderson's literary value is to be expected, and that most of them realize his kinship with Whitman is not surprising. Untermeyer, Walsh, Rosenfeld, Collins, Krutch, Fagin, Miles, Smith, Chase, and Pattee agreed that Anderson's was a Whitmanesque style. Boynton, Lovett, Lewisohn, Sherman, Morris, and Fagin, too, discussed Anderson's realism as a counterpart of Whitman's. Comparison of their treatment of humanity was the concern of Lovett, Gregory, Lewisohn, Kellogg, Bromfield, Sherman, Whipple, Michaud, Smith, and Hartwick.

None of these critics, however, has drawn parallels between the two writers. The appraisals of each have been general; no specific comparisons have been made. That Anderson had read and had been influenced by Whitman is evident enough, but just how and where this influence occurred remains to be discovered.

Finally, if one cared to draw a graph of the appraisals of Anderson's works, one would discover the peak of admiration occurring in 1927, after which time critics generally agreed that Anderson was not the powerful writer that some had thought him to be. The new practical group of critics attacked his sentimentality and his continual reference to his "confused" state. They had no patience with him and did not hesitate to say so, so that by 1934 his rating as a literary writer was extremely low.



## II

## Anderson's Opinion of Whitman

Sherwood Anderson has written criticisms of Carl Sandburg, Gertrude Stein, Ring Lardner, Sinclair Lewis, and others, but only occasionally does the reader find mention of Whitman in his writings.

As a factory worker, he rebelled, according to his own statements, against the conditions of the working men and women. It was all very well for Whitman, Sandburg, and other poets to praise and make heroes of this class but industrialism had caused the degradation of "the democracy on which Whitman had counted so much."<sup>88</sup> Then, in parentheses, he made this remark: "I had not heard of Whitman then. My thoughts were my own."<sup>89</sup> Later, while working in Columbus, Ohio, he began to read extensively. It was at this time, he said, that he became acquainted with Whitman.<sup>90</sup>

In his The Modern Writer (1925), which is a denunciation of standardization, he satirically noticed that "although by

<sup>88</sup>

Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story, New York, 1924, pp.141-142.

<sup>89</sup>

Ibid., p.142.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p.155. He says: "However I read greedily everything that came into my hands. Laura Jean Libbey, Walter Scott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Fielding, Shakespeare, Jules Verne, Balzac, the Bible, Stephen Crane, dime novels, Cooper, Stevenson, our own Mark Twain and Howells--and later Whitman."



the world in general Whitman is recognized as our one great American poet, I have heard of no general movement to introduce him into our public schools to take the place of the decidedly second rate and imitative New Englander, Longfellow.<sup>91</sup>

In speaking of the "Modern Movement," as he designated it, with relation to the common person, he declared that Whitman and Dreiser were the first real instigators of a better type of workman.<sup>92</sup>

The following year, 1926, saw the publication of his Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, which contained only two references to Whitman: the first being a quotation,<sup>93</sup> and the second being a conclusion that, since Whitman came out of a robust age primarily interested in conquering the wilderness of the West, his theories could be of little use in this age of the factory.<sup>94</sup>

Four years later (1930) in a review of Assorted Articles, a book written by D. H. Lawrence, Anderson referred to Whitman and used the latter's term "dry-necks" for certain types of readers. He said:

<sup>91</sup> Sherwood Anderson, The Modern Writer, San Francisco [1925], p.10.

<sup>92</sup> See ibid., p.34.

<sup>93</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, New York, 1926, p.90. The quotation reads: "Come ye men of "these States," as old Walt Whitman was so fond of saying, in his windier moods..."

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp.198-199.



Making people clean and nice again, as Whitman at his best did, making them again feel to you as fields and trees feel.

You'll get the same feeling from "Assorted Articles" ...unless you are, alas, dry-necks, in which case all of Lawrence will be just stench to you....

As Whitman has become to the dry-necks.<sup>95</sup>

In 1933 appeared an edition of Whitman's Leaves of Grass, selected and illustrated by Charles Cullen, which contained an introduction by Anderson. Of Whitman, he wrote:

Whitman is in the bones of America as Ralph Waldo Emerson is in the American mentality, but what is needed here now is a return to the bones and blood of life--to Whitman....<sup>96</sup>

Whitman is the singer of the strong lustful ones, of the men who could love a woman or a field or the sky above the prairies, forest or seas. He walked far and wide, bare-throated, brown-armed, and singing... not up in the mind only but with his whole body. He was thought too crude, too lustful. They turned away from him. As a boy and young man I myself went into respectable middle-class homes and found there volumes of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" with the so-called ugly lustful passages cut out with scissors.

How shameful! How can there be real delicacy without strength? I proclaim Whitman the most delicate

<sup>95</sup> Sherwood Anderson, "A Man's Mind," in The New Republic, Ixiii (1930), 22. The dots do not indicate omission but occur in the article as indicated in the text above.

<sup>96</sup> Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (selected and illustrated by Charles Cullen), New York [1933], p.v. The material omitted is a declamation against modern industrialism.



and tender of all American singers. Here is this volume of his songs the American artist Charles Cul- len having made alive glowing pictures for it, pic- tures full of pregnant strangeness. I hail it.

Read again "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."... "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." Read the rocking long and short American verses. Who was it said only the negroes had brought real song into America? Hail, all hail, negro workmen, river hands, plantation hands, makers of songs, but hail also, always Whitman, white American, lustful one....

Singer of the great land, the broad land... singer of growing cities, horses plowing, men sowing seed, soft waves breaking on sea shores, forest singer, town and dusty country road singer.

The great sweet land that Walt Whitman sang so lustily is still here. People now forget what Amer- ica is... Why forget how huge, varied, strong and flowing it is? We gather too much and stay too long in holes in cities. We forget land-love, river and sky-love. To these we must return before we begin again to get brother to brother love of which Whit- man sang and dreamed.

Whitman is the bones and blood of America. He is the real American singer. What is wanted among us now is a return to Whitman, to his songs, his dreams, his consciousness of the possibilities of the land that was his land and is our land.<sup>97</sup>

In a personal letter mailed from Nyack, New York, on October 7, 1935, to the writer of this study, Anderson states emphatically his attitude toward the influence of Walt Whitman. The letter reads:

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<sup>97</sup> Whitman, Leaves of Grass, pp.vi-vii. The dots do not in- dicate omission but appear in the text.



I think that any American writer who was not influenced by Walt Whitman would be dead to the work of our most significant poet.

Sincerely  
Sherwood Anderson

### III

#### A Comparison of the Writings of Anderson and Whitman

The material for this section will be treated under four divisions: democracy, religion, sex, and verse technique. By a direct comparison of the works of Anderson and Whitman, it is hoped that the degree of influence of the latter upon the former may be determined. It is fitting, as the writer of this thesis believes, to indicate now that neither in this nor in any chapter contained herein can the actual degree be decided; only the apparent degree can be determined.

##### A. Democracy

Whitman's Leaves of Grass is a manifestation of democracy. The book reveals a passion for America rarely found among writers; it is replete with the spirit of absolute human equality and brotherhood--universal, as well as national. To Whitman, divinity in nature and in humanity is the keynote to the democratic spirit; the greatness of a nation cannot be



determined by its material prosperity.<sup>98</sup> He finds his ideal among the masses and he glories in a common heritage. Self-reliance must be the motto of every person. Just how these ideas concern Anderson is the problem to be solved, if possible, here./

Anderson continually rails against the pathetic conditions of the working class, against industrialism, and above all against standardization. Yet he feels that all this will pass and the workman will come into his own again as Whitman himself dreamed. He perceives dire consequences if the American people persist in their monetary ambitions and neglect the spiritual.

And now let us examine passages from Whitman and Anderson, using first only the prose. Anderson writes in 1924:

And in my own time I was to see the grip of the New England, the Puritanic culture, begin to loosen. The physical incoming of the Celts, Latins, Slavs, men of the Far East, the blood of the dreaming nations of the world gradually flowing thicker and thicker in the body of the American, and the shrewd shop-keeping money-saving blood of the northern men getting thinner and thinner.<sup>99</sup>

He repeats his thought again in this manner:

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<sup>98</sup> See Whitman, Vistas, pp.1-83, for a further discussion of this doctrine or theory.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson, Story, p.101.



For while our schools and colleges and in our literature the puritan, the New Englander ruled, people were pouring into America from all over western Europe. The cold blood of the men of the North was being mixed constantly with the warmer blood of the South. Italians came. The Greeks and the southern Slavs came in hundreds of thousands. The eager highly temperamental Jews and the imaginative Celts poured in. On the West coast they got the Spaniard and the Mexican, and no man ever, I believe, accused the Spaniard or the Mexican of being puritanic.<sup>100</sup>

Yet Whitman, as early as 1856, writes:

These States are the amplest poem,  
Here is not merely a nation but a  
teeming Nation of nations,<sup>101</sup>

and later, in 1872, he continues:

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,  
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the  
Present only,  
The Past is also stored in thee,  
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself  
alone, not of the Western continent  
alone,  
Earth's résumé entire floats on thy keel  
O ship, is steadied by thy spars,  
With thee Time voyages in trust, the  
antecedent nations sink or swim  
with thee,  
With all their ancient struggles,  
martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou  
bear'st the other continents,

<sup>100</sup> Anderson, Writer, p.9.

<sup>101</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.288. The excerpt is from "By Blue Ontario's Shore."



Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the  
 destination-port triumphant;  
 Steer them with good strong hand and  
 wary eye O helmsman, thou carriest  
 great companions,  
 Venerable priestly Asia sails this day  
 with thee,  
 And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.<sup>102</sup>

He sees

A new race dominating previous ones  
 and grander far, with new contests,  
 New politics, new literatures and re-  
 ligions, new inventions and arts.<sup>103</sup>

Like Whitman, Anderson accepted this new blood and declared that he wanted to belong to the new America which was "alive, an America that was no longer a despised cultural foster child of Europe, with unpleasant questions always being asked about its parentage, to an America that has begun to be conscious of itself as a living, home-making folk...."<sup>104</sup>

Whitman, on the other hand, in his famous Democratic Vistas declared that our intellect and our imagination were still foreign. The models of our literature were concerned with the nobility, as found in Europe, having little or no regard for

<sup>102</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.380-381, from "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood."

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.22, from "Starting from Paumanok."

<sup>104</sup> Anderson, Writer, p.395.



the common people, who, to him, were the very backbone of democracy. America, he believed, needed to formulate her own ideas of culture and literature.<sup>105</sup>

\* Again, one hardly needs to be reminded that in Leaves of Grass Whitman concerned himself with America as an independent nation, the "New World," as he put it. He attempted to bring home to the American people the realization that theirs was a free, living nation ready for new, big things.

Another comparison between these two writers may be made in this respect: that both recognized the shortcomings of democracy. Whitman minces no words about the matter:

I would alarm and caution even the political and business reader, and to the utmost extent, against the prevailing delusion that the establishment of free political institutions, and plentiful intellectual smartness, with general good order, physical plenty, industry, etc., (desirable and precious advantages as they are,) do, of themselves, determine and yield to our experiment of democracy the fruitage of success. With such advantages at present fully, or almost fully, possess'd--(Whitman writes here of the victorious Union)--society, in these states, is canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten. Political, or law-made society is, and private, or voluntary society, is also. In any vigor, the element of the moral conscience, the most important, the verteber to State or man, seems to me either entirely lacking, or seriously enfeebled or ungrown.

I say we had best look at our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing

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<sup>105</sup>The material for this paragraph is found in Whitman's Democratic Vistas, pp. 34-35 and p. 52.



some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believ'd in, (for all this hectic glow, and these melo-dramatic screamings,) nor is humanity itself believ'd in. What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask? The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the littérateurs is to find something to make fun of.<sup>106</sup>

He continues:

The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary is tainted. The great cities week with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelity, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business, (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain.<sup>107</sup>

Then he turns to the cities and their teeming populaces:

But sternly discarding, shutting our eyes to the glow and grandeur of the general superficial

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<sup>106</sup> Whitman, Vistas, pp.11-12.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.12.



effect [of cities], coming down to what is of the only real importance, Personalities, and examining minutely, we question, we ask, Are there, indeed, men here worthy of the name? Are there athletes? Are there perfect women to match the generous material luxuriance? Is there a pervading atmosphere of beautiful manners? Are there crops of fine youths, and majestic old persons? Are there arts worthy freedom and a rich people? Is there a great moral and religious civilization--the only justification of a great material one? Confess that to severe eyes, using the moral microscope upon humanity, a sort of dry and flat Sahara appears, these cities, crowded with petty grotesques, malformations, phantoms, playing meaningless antics.<sup>108</sup>

In a short treatise entitled "Foundation Stages--Then Others," included among Notes Left Over, Whitman summarizes his thoughts: "Soon, it will be fully realized that ostensible wealth and money-making, show, luxury, etc., imperatively necessitate something beyond--namely, the same, eternal moral and spiritual--esthetic attributes, elements."<sup>109</sup>

Now let us turn to Anderson, who flamboyantly voices his opinion of America's democracy. Needless to say, a swift perusal of all his writings indicates that he is keenly aware of the evils of industrialism. His bitterness is evident in this passage:

The outer surface of my life was too violently uncouth, too persistently uncouth. Well enough

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<sup>108</sup> Whitman, Vistas, p.14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.163.



for Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg and others to sing of the strength and fineness of laboring men, making heroes of them, but already the democratic dream had faded and laborers were not my heroes. I was born fussy, liked cleanliness and orderliness about me and already had been thrown too much into the midst of shiftlessness. The socialists and communists I had seen and heard talk nearly all struck me as men who had no sense of life at all. They were so likely to be dry intellectual sterile men. Already I had begun asking myself the questions I have been asking myself ever since. "Does no man love another man? Why does not some man arise who wants the man working next to him work in the midst of order? Can a man and a woman love each other when they live in an ugly house in an ugly street? Why do working men and women so often seem perversely unclean and disorderly in their houses? Why do not factory owners realize that although they build large, well-lighted factories, they will accomplish nothing until they realize the need of order and cleanliness in thinking and feeling also?..." Was it not apparent that something had happened to the democracy on which Whitman had counted so much?<sup>110</sup>

In 1856 Whitman had written in the same vein:

What is your money-making now?  
what can it do now?  
What is your respectability now?  
What are your theology, tuition,  
society, traditions, statute-  
books, now?  
Where are your jibes of being now?  
Where are your cavils about the soul  
now?<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Anderson, Story, pp.141-142.

<sup>111</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.161, from "Song of the Broad-Axe."



Materialism to Anderson, as to Whitman, was the greatest evil of democracy:

Democracy shall spread itself out thinner and thinner, it shall come to nothing but empty mouthings in the end. Everywhere, all over the earth, shall be the dreary commercialism and material success of, say the later Byzantine Empire. In the West and after the great dukes, the kings and the popes, the commoners--who were not commoners after all but only stole the name--are having their day. The shrewd little money-getters with the cry "democracy" on their lips shall rule for a time and then the real commoners shall come--and that shall be the worst time of all. Oh, the futile little vanity of the workers who have forgotten the cunning of hands, who have long let machines take the place of the cunning of hands!<sup>112</sup>

Again he says:

There is a tiny faint voice speaking: "The money-makers will grow weary and disgusted with their own money-making and labor shall have lost all faith, all sense of the cunning of the hand. What a mess it will be!<sup>113</sup>

Bitterly he writes:

The smart fellows of the American Intelligentsia sat about in restaurants in New York and wrote articles for the political and semi-literary

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<sup>112</sup> Anderson, Story, p.187.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.189.



weeklies. A smart saying they had heard at dinner or lunch the day before was passed off as their own in the next article they wrote. The usual plan was to write of politics or politicians or to slaughter some second-rate artist--in short, to pick out easy game and kill it with their straw shafts and they gained great reputations by pointing out the asininity of men everyone already knew for asses.<sup>114</sup>

\* The working class to Whitman and Anderson is the key to the very existence of democracy. The people who comprise this class are divine in body as well as in soul. Whatever they may touch becomes, in turn, divine and good. Beauty is their watchword, whether spiritual or physical. Their work is splendid and fine; their lives exemplify the ideal.

Whitman writes:

(Ah little recks the laborer,  
How near his work is holding him  
to God.  
The loving Laborer through space  
and time.)<sup>115</sup>

To him, the purpose and aim of the poet was

To teach the average man the glory  
of his daily walk and trade,...

I say I bring thee Muse to-day and here,  
All occupations, duties broad and close,

<sup>114</sup> Anderson, Story, pp.250-251.

<sup>115</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.166, from "Song of the Exposition."



Toil, healthy toil and sweat, endless,  
without cessation, . . .  
Whatever forms the average, strong,  
complete, sweet-blooded man or  
woman, the perfect longeue per-  
sonality,  
And helps its present life to health  
and happiness, and shapes its soul,  
For the eternal real life to come.<sup>116</sup>

Anderson declares that "to the workman his materials are as the face of his God seen over the rim of the world. His materials are the promise of the coming of God to the workman."<sup>117</sup> He supplements this thought by remarking that the laborers have found "a kind of religion of brotherhood..."<sup>118</sup>

Whitman avows

All the past we leave behind,  
We debouch upon a newer mightier world,  
varied world,  
Fresh and strong the world we seize  
world of labor and the march,  
Pioneers! O pioneers!<sup>119</sup>

and Anderson explains that "the Modern Movement, then, seen from this point of view, is in reality an attempt on the part

<sup>116</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.171.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, Story, pp.294-295.

<sup>118</sup> Sherwood Anderson, "Elizabethton, Tennessee," in The Nation, cxxviii (1929), 527. He facetiously ends his sentence, "and that is something."

<sup>119</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.195, from "Birds of Passage."



of the workman to get back into his own hands some control over the tools and materials of his craft.<sup>120</sup>

In a poem entitled "Outlines for a Tomb," Whitman prophesies the time when

All, all the shows of laboring life,  
 City and country, women's, men's and  
 children's,  
 Their wants provided for, hued in  
 the sun and tinged for once with  
 joy  
 Marriage, the street, the factory,  
 farm, the house-room, lodging-  
 room,  
 Labor and toil, the bath, gymnasium,  
 playground, library, college,  
 The student, boy or girl, led forward  
 to be taught,  
 The sick cared for, the shoeless shod,  
 the orphan father'd and mother'd,  
 The hungry fed, the houseless housed;  
 (The intentions perfect and divine,  
 The workings, details, haply human.)<sup>121</sup>

And Anderson writes:

What a day it would be--the day I mean when all workmen came to a certain decision--that they would no longer put their hands to cheap materials or do cheap hurried work--for their manhood's sake.

And what a day also--when those who are so concerned with the fate of mankind quit talking so much about housing, food, starving children and wages.

<sup>120</sup>Anderson, Writer, pp.31-32. The "point of view" mentioned is the idea that the workman attempts to express in the product produced by his hands some need of his inner self. See pp.30-31.

<sup>121</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.320, from "Autumn Rivulets."



As well let the body starve or freeze at once  
as to go on forever starving and freezing the  
workman impulse in men.<sup>122</sup>

Whitman states the idea again in this way:

You workwomen and workmen of these  
States having your own divine  
and strong life,  
And all else giving place to men  
and women like you.<sup>123</sup>

Anderson writes: "I do not like ugliness but to me the soil, the houses in which poor people live, the overalls of workers, the brown strong gnarled hands of workers are not ugly."<sup>124</sup> The whole of Leaves of Grass by Whitman is a celebration of the humble laborer, the "hero,"<sup>125</sup> whose entire life, spiritual and physical, is beautiful. In the majority of Anderson's publications, however, the futility of the worker's life is portrayed; no matter how fine a character the laborer may possess he is beaten down by the adverse circumstances of mere existence.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Anderson, Notebook, pp.17-18.

<sup>123</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.185, from "A Song for Occupations."

<sup>124</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.168.

<sup>125</sup> See Whitman, Leaves, p.73, in "Song of Myself."

<sup>126</sup> See Anderson's novels.



Parallel to this democratic conception of mankind is the belief of these writers in their ability to assume the identities of other people. Whitman says:

I am the mate and companion of people,  
all just as immortal and fathomless  
as myself.<sup>127</sup>

and Anderson says: "I talk to men, make love to women, play with children. I am, in fancy and during one day, a dozen other men. I live inside them, pick up objects with their fingers, think their thoughts, feel what they feel."<sup>128</sup>

Whitman writes:

Not a youngster is taken for larceny  
but I go up too, and am tried and  
sentenced.<sup>129</sup>

Anderson echoes the thought: "I am a young boy, a vagrant picked up by the police."<sup>130</sup>

Anderson again writes:

<sup>127</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.73, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.130.

<sup>129</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.61, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.62.



My body does not belong to me.  
 My body belongs to tired women  
 who have found no lovers.  
 It belongs to half men and half women.  
 My body belongs to those who lust  
 and those who shrink from lusting.  
 My body belongs to the roots of trees.  
 It shall be consumed with fire on a  
 far horizon.  
 The smoke that arises from my  
 burning body shall make the western  
 skies golden.  
 My body belongs to a Virginia mob  
 that runs to kill negroes. It be-  
 longs to a woman whose husband was  
 killed in a railroad wreck. It be-  
 longs to an old man dying by a fire  
 in a wood, to a negress who is on  
 her knees scrubbing floors, to a  
 millionaire who drives an automobile.  
 My body belongs to one whose son has  
 killed a man and has been sent to  
 prison.  
 It belongs to those who have the lust  
 for killing and to those who kill.  
 My body is a stick a strong man has  
 stuck in the ground. It is a post  
 a drunkard has leaned against.  
 My body is a cunning wind. It is a  
 thought in the night, a wound that  
 bleeds, the breath of a god, the  
 quavering end of a song.<sup>131</sup>

Yet Whitman in 1855 wrote these lines:

I am of old and young, of the foolish  
 as much as the wise,  
 Regardless of others, ever regardful  
 of others,  
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child  
 as well as a man,

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<sup>131</sup> Sherwood Anderson, A New Testament, New York, 1927, pp.  
 26-27. The name of the poem is "The Healer."



Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse  
 and stuff'd with the stuff that  
 is fine,  
 One of the Nation of many nations,  
 the smallest the same and the  
 largest the same,  
 A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a  
 planter nonchalant and hospitable  
 down by the Oconee I live,  
 A Yankee bound my own way ready for  
 trade, my joints the limberest  
 joints on earth and the sternest  
 joints on earth,  
 A Kentuckian walking the vale of the  
 Elkhorn in my deer-skin leggings,  
 a Louisianian or Georgian,  
 A boatman over lakes or bays or along  
 coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buck-  
 eye;  
 At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or  
 up in the bush, or with fishermen  
 off Newfoundland,  
 At home in the fleet of ice-boats,  
 sailing with the rest and tacking,  
 At home on the hills of Vermont, or in  
 the woods of Maine, or the Texan  
 ranch,  
 Comrade of Californians, comrade of  
 free North-Westerners, (loving their  
 big proportions,)  
 Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade  
 of all who shake hands and welcome  
 to drink and meat,  
 A learner with the simplest, a teacher  
 of the thoughtfullest,  
 A novice beginning yet experient of  
 myriads of seasons,  
 Of every hue and caste am I, of every  
 rank and religion,  
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman,  
 sailor, quaker,  
 Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer,  
 physician, priest.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Whitman, Leaves, pp.37-38, from "Song of Myself."



Although Whitman does make his catalogue more inclusive, the reader realizes at once that here is probably the germ of Anderson's idea.

These parallels, then, indicate the realization that Anderson, two generations removed from Whitman, was surprisingly akin to the latter in his theories of democracy; the existence of which depends mainly upon the working class. He, like Whitman, declared the spiritual life to be a necessary part of this democracy. Like his predecessor again, he desired an American literature and a truly American life distinct from that of Europe.<sup>133</sup>

#### B. Religion

Whitman, although he denied the fact, had the romantic point of view concerning religion. He believed in divine immanence; he felt that God or the soul was in everything. To him, earth was as divine as heaven, the body as divine as the soul. Death is welcomed by him as joyously as life.

Anderson, on the other hand, contradicts himself in his account of God, who obviously is not as important to his attitude toward life as God is to Whitman. Nowhere does Whitman deny God as Anderson does in his autobiography.<sup>134</sup> Yet he

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<sup>133</sup>See Anderson's Notebook, pp.196-198 and Whitman's Vistas, pp.4-5.

<sup>134</sup>See Anderson's Story, p.270.



writes later, "Man, even the brave and free Man, is somewhat a less worthy object of glorification than God;"<sup>135</sup> and his A New Testament (1927) has general references to the Almighty and to Christ. He even writes, "I am one who would serve God."<sup>136</sup>

Both authors, however, have the same confidence in actual personal contact with God after death. Whitman says:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,  
The Lord will be there and wait till I  
come on perfect terms,<sup>137</sup>

while Anderson writes:

There shall be a way found by which  
I may go through a street to the  
door of God's house. I shall find  
words to lay on my lips.  
I shall find words to speak at the  
door of God's house.<sup>138</sup>

Anderson's

God lies on the ground in the forest

135 See Anderson's Story, p.301.

136 Anderson, Testament, p.86.

137 Whitman, Leaves, p.70, from "Song of Myself."

138 Anderson, Testament, p.31, from "A Dreamer."



with his head at the base of a tree.  
The fingers of God flutter like the  
wings of a gnat.

A little leaf in the forest, touched  
by the finger of God, whirls and  
twists in an agony of delight.<sup>139</sup>

is reminiscent of Whitman's conception of God. In the same  
vein he later proclaims:

He did not teach me much of God but  
fragments of God's truth clung to me.<sup>140</sup>

Then too, "The Visit in the Morning," a long poem, is  
worthy of full-length quotation because of its Whitmanesque  
expression and attitude. The use of the sea is also quite  
typical of Whitmanic style.

It was by the sea--  
I was lying on my belly and God  
came and turned me over.  
He turned my face out of the sand,  
the yellow sightless sand.

God caressed me and his caress was  
gentle and soft.  
Out of my eyes he took what was  
sightless,  
Out of my ears deafness.

It has been permitted me to live  
and that was sweet before your time.

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<sup>139</sup> Anderson, Testament, pp.38-39, from "Ambition."

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.86. The "he" is an old man who talks to the  
poet about God. The poem is entitled "Word Factories."



The Divine inheritance God gave in  
the morning.

He kissed my lips, my breasts, my  
arms.

Then my lips again.

Have you walked by a mountain?  
Have you walked by the sea?

I have been in the veins of the mountains,  
I have been in each drop of water God  
spat out of his mouth.  
A wind blowing out of my ears troubled  
the waters of the seas.

God came to me as a bird comes out  
of a bush--softly--into a breaking day.

God came to me in a glaring light.

I have gone into you.  
I have become of you.  
In my pocket is the key to your house.  
In my veins your blood flows.  
The breath of you inflates my lungs.  
The sweetness of you sleeps in my sleep.

If you do not understand what I am  
saying that is of no importance.  
That the wind blows in trees and that  
deaf men walk under the branches  
leading the sightless is of no  
importance.

I was by the sea when God came to me.  
He turned me over, turned my face out  
of the eyeless yellow sand.  
He kissed my lips and I became alive.<sup>141</sup>

And again Anderson writes:

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<sup>141</sup> Anderson, Testament, pp. 54-56, from "The Visit in the Morning."



Do you believe--now listen--I do.  
 Say, you--now listen--do you  
 believe the hand of God reached  
 down to me in the flood? I do.  
 'Twas like a streak of fire along  
 my back. That's a lie, of course.  
 The face of God looked down at  
 me, over the rim of the world.<sup>142</sup>

Whitman, of course, expresses his mystical experiences  
 much better than Anderson. He writes:

I mind how once we lay such a trans-  
 parent summer morning,  
 How you settled your head athwart my  
 hips and gently turn'd over upon me.  
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-  
 bone, and plunged your tongue to  
 my bare-stript heart,  
 And reach'd till you felt my beard,  
 and reach'd till you held my feet.<sup>143</sup>

Again he says:

I throw myself upon your breast my  
 father,  
 I cling to you so that you cannot  
 unloose me,  
 I hold you so firm till you answer  
 me something.

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<sup>142</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Mid-American Chants, New York and London, 1928, p.18.

<sup>143</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.27, from "Song of Myself." The "you" is the soul or the spirit of God.



Kiss me my father,  
 Touch me with your lips as I touch  
 those I love,  
 Breathe to me while I hold you close  
 the secret of the murmuring I envy.<sup>144</sup>

A most interesting characteristic of these authors with regard to their spiritual beliefs is their self-identification with Christ. This egotistical conception is seldom found among writers.

Here we have Whitman referring to himself as

Walking the old hills of Judaea with  
 the beautiful gentle God by my side,<sup>145</sup>

and

Taking myself the exact dimensions  
 of Jehovah,<sup>146</sup>

and again

And I know that the hand of God is

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<sup>144</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.217, from "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life." "Father" refers to the spirit of God. Also interesting to note is that the setting of the entire poem is along the seashore, as is Anderson's poem.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.54, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.63.



the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God  
is the brother of my own.<sup>147</sup>

He even visualizes the last days of Christ:

That I could forget the mockers and  
insults!  
That I could forget the trickling  
tears and the blows of the bludgeons  
and hammers!  
That I could look with a separate  
look on my own crucifixion and  
bloody crowning!<sup>148</sup>

Anderson writes of Christ in the same manner. In a prose-poem, "Testament of an Old Man," he refers to his brain as a "hound mind" which "has run beside Jesus the Prince as he walked alone on a mountain";<sup>149</sup> a thought which he repeats, "My hound mind has been into the mountains with Jesus."<sup>150</sup> Again, he writes: "Who knew how I knelt before lives, how like a white Christ I hungered and loved my way into lives."<sup>151</sup> Complete identification with Christ is found in these lines:

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<sup>147</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.27.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>149</sup> Anderson, Testament, p.34.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.36.



I am the Christ you crucified.  
Why did you bring me the Christ  
that died?<sup>152</sup>

It may be concluded, then, that both believed in a humane God, in immortality, and in self-identification with Christ. It is evident, however, that Whitman was much more religious than Anderson, and that he could express his mystical experiences with a more ardent fervor than could the latter.

### C. Sex

Both Whitman and Anderson are keenly interested in sex, with the result that critics have accused them of indecency. It must be admitted that this is often true; yet there are times when each expresses his doctrine of the sexual relationship of men and women in a splendid manner. Both feel the sacredness of the human body and deplore the "Puritanism" of the average person. To both, "motherhood" or "fatherhood" alike, as Whitman puts it, is sacred. Sexual love, lust, prostitution, homosexuality exist and should be written of as a part of human life in the frankest manner.

Whitman in his "Song of Myself," "Calamus," and "Children of Adam" sections in Leaves of Grass deals with spiritual and

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<sup>152</sup>Anderson, Testament, p.45, from "Singing Swamp Negro."



physical love in all its phases as do the writings of Anderson. Whitman boastfully chants

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good  
belongs to you,<sup>153</sup>

as does Anderson, whose lines

I am the man.  
I am in the body of the man.  
I, the singer, live in his body<sup>154</sup>

frankly echo his predecessor.

"The flesh of my body is become good";<sup>155</sup> "the inside of my body was made clean,"<sup>156</sup> declares Anderson echoing his forerunner, who boasted, "I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,"<sup>157</sup> and "Divine am I inside and out."<sup>158</sup>

To these men the love of man for woman is a natural phenomenon worthy of exultation and celebration. Both have

<sup>153</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.24, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>154</sup> Anderson, Testament, p.106, from "Two Glad Men."

<sup>155</sup> Anderson, Chants, p.12.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>157</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.45, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.44.



defended their points of view in a similar manner. Whitman declared his Leaves of Grass to be primarily a song of sex, so much a part of his whole plan that the majority of his poems might well have remained unwritten were it omitted. To him, sexuality is an important element in literature.<sup>159</sup> Anderson bases the defense of his own writings on the hypothesis of the so-called "Modern Movement" with its frank treatment of sex.<sup>160</sup>

Whitman celebrates the love of a man for a woman in such poems as "Song of Myself," "To a Common Prostitute," "The Sleepers," and the "Children of Adam" section. Anderson does the same thing in "Song of Theodore," "The Stranger," "Song of the Love of Women," "The Lover," "Song of the Mating Time," "Song Long After," "Reminiscent Song," found in Mid-American Chants.

Anderson declares:

You have come to me out of the arms  
of your lovers.  
You have come to me out of your warm  
close place.  
You have lost yourself in the  
nothingness.  
You are a leaf tossed in a wind.  
You are a blade of grass torn out  
of the ground.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Whitman, Vistas, pp.135-136.

<sup>160</sup> See Anderson's Story, pp.373-379 and his article, "America on a Cultural Jag," In The Saturday Review of Literature, iv (1927), 364-365.

<sup>161</sup> Anderson, Testament, p.17, from "Testament."



Whitman, too, had said

I draw you close to me, you women,  
I cannot let you go, I would do  
you good,<sup>162</sup>

and had used the same figure of speech as Anderson in these lines:

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,  
It may be you transpire from the  
breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I  
would have loved them.<sup>163</sup>

This use of symbolism in connection with sex is carried still further by these poets. Anderson declares:

I am but one man but in my loins is  
the seed that shall be planted in  
fields and in town. The lords of  
life shall come into the land.<sup>164</sup>

And again:

Deep in my old valley lies the  
naked man.

<sup>162</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.87, from "A Woman Waits for Me."

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p.28, from "Song of Myself."

<sup>164</sup>Anderson, Testament, p.105, from "Two Glad Men."



He is a seed,  
 Seeds sleep in him.  
 My man shall be the father of a  
 tribe, a race.  
 He is the world and all the world  
 has been asleep in him.<sup>165</sup>

In his prose-poem, "Motherhood,"<sup>166</sup> the word "seed" has again been employed in a striking metaphor.

This idea of sex is similarly found in Whitman, who writes:

I shall look for loving crops from  
 the birth, life, death, immor-  
 tality, I plant so lovingly now,<sup>167</sup>

and who declares that he sings

of seeds dropping into the ground,  
 of births.<sup>168</sup>

It is a noticeable fact, too, that these writers deal with the prostitute who, to them, has her place in society and so should be written about. Whitman has two poems, "To

<sup>165</sup> Anderson, Chants, p.52.

<sup>166</sup> Sherwood Anderson, The Triumph of the Egg, New York, 1921, pp.168-170.

<sup>167</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.88, from "A Woman Waits for Me."

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.409, from "Thoughts."



a Common Prostitute" and "Once I Pass'd through a Populous City," as does Anderson whose "Song of the Love of Women" and "Song Long After" deal with this type of person. Both have references to the prostitute scattered throughout their works.

Thus, these comparisons indicate an unusual open-minded attitude toward sex in its various phases. To them, physical love is an important phase of our democracy and should be sensibly and frankly treated.

A minor parallel, not necessarily concerned with sex, but a most eccentric one, follows. Whitman writes in 1855:

There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and in the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well,<sup>169</sup>

and Anderson remarks, "And I get also a kind of aroma from people."<sup>170</sup> The idea of people exuding an individual odor or aroma is certainly unusual and not usually found, so that it is probable that Anderson received the idea directly from his forerunner of realistic expression.

The doctrine of "amativeness" love of man for man, is a theory of Whitman's which has been subjected to much reproach and conjecture. This type of love seemed to him a vital part

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<sup>169</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.81, from "I Sing the Body Electric." My italics.

<sup>170</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.47.

but, "I want to stay with the good" sounds appropriate &  
we'd cross "I want to stay with the good" road  
when it's time, and I wouldn't mind it coming up  
in conversation. I think the commonest conversation is about  
leaving, about all the reasons people feel like they have to

and about all the reasons people feel like they have to leave.  
I think the commonest conversation is about

oh, I like you more and you like me more and we  
should be together and things like that and  
I think the commonest conversation is about the  
commonest conversation is about leaving.

and when we talk to each other I think common  
is about leaving but not about leaving to stay on

the commonest conversation is about  
n o i , you you know the good "leaving" is to practice  
leaving & then on leaving the good and right situation  
you leave & then at some point you come back, and

of our so-called democracy, in fact its true foundation. His "Calamus" section<sup>171</sup> offers the key to this conception. Anderson does not hold to this entire doctrine but he does write of mutual love.

If you men who are my friends and those of you who are acquaintances could surrender yourselves to me for just a little while.

I tell you what--I would take you within myself and carry you around within me as though I were a pregnant woman,<sup>172</sup>

is Anderson's method of expressing his sentiment toward this idea. Whitman has written:

(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,  
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me whenever I go,  
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,  
I am fill'd with them; and I will fill them in return.)<sup>173</sup>

To quote Anderson again:

<sup>171</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.95-113.

<sup>172</sup> Anderson, Testament, p.11, from "A Young Man."

<sup>173</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.124, from "Song of the Open Road."



You are a man and I would take hold  
of your hand;<sup>174</sup>

I am on a couch by this window and  
I could ask a woman to come here to  
lie with me or a man either for that  
matter;<sup>175</sup>

Good brother, walking up and down,  
it is my voice you hear calling to  
you out of a city;<sup>176</sup>

and again in Mid-American Chants:

O my beloved--men and women--I  
come into your presence. It is  
night and I am alone and I come  
to you.... See, I embrace you.  
I take you in my arms and I run  
away;<sup>177</sup>

... My cunning fingers are of the  
flesh. They are like me and I would  
make love always, to all people--  
men and women--here--in Chicago--  
in America--everywhere--always--  
forever--while my life lasts.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>174</sup>Anderson, Testament, p.24, from "Hunger."

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p.97, from "Young Man Filled with Feeling of Power."

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p.100, from "Brother."

<sup>177</sup>Anderson, Chants, p.25. The sentences omitted read: "I open the window of my room so that you may come in. I am a lover and I would touch you with the fingers of my hands. In my eyes a fire burns. The strength of my imaginings is beyond words to record. I see the loveliness in you that is hidden away. I take something from you."

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p.25. The sentences omitted are: "I am alone in my room at night and in me is the spirit of the old priests. What cunning fingers I have. They make intricate designs on the white paper. See, the designs are words and sentences. I am not a priest but a lover, a new kind of lover, one who is of the flesh and not of the flesh."



True, these quotations contain only the germ of homosexuality; yet, they are surprisingly like Whitman.

Whoever you are holding me now in hand;<sup>179</sup>

I have loved many women and men,  
but I love none better than you;<sup>180</sup>

I will write the evangel-poem of  
comrades and of love,  
For who but I should understand love  
with all its sorrow and joy?  
And who but I should be the poet of  
comrades?<sup>181</sup>

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as  
good belongs to you;<sup>182</sup>

I do not ask who you are, that is  
not important to me,  
You can do nothing and be nothing  
but what I will enfold you.<sup>183</sup>

A thorough study of the "Calamus" poems, however, very definitely emphasizes the fact that Anderson's handling of similar material is rather passive and ineffectual, which may be the result of imitation.

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Whitman, Leaves, p.97, from "Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand."

180

Ibid., p.198, from "To You."

181

Ibid., p.15, from "Starting from Paumanok."

182

Ibid., p.24, from "Song of Myself."

183

Ibid., p.63,



Whitman and Anderson felt themselves passive persons who were a part of the endless moving and swarming of things about them--the "float," as they termed it. This "float" obviously leads to contradiction and confusion, which may readily explain Anderson's cry, "I am a child, a confused child in a confused world."<sup>184</sup> Leaves of Grass and A New Testament are the epitomes of this doctrine.

#### D. Verse Technique

Whitman's Leaves of Grass was the first volume of modern "free verse" written in the English language, although William Blake had published during the preceding century his Prophetic Books, in which the material was neither prose nor verse.<sup>185</sup> Since its publication in 1855, many volumes of this type have appeared, which include Mid-American Chants and A New Testament. A comparison of the three volumes mentioned discloses marked similarities in verse technique. So-called "run-on" lines, in which the thought carries over from one line to the next, occur very rarely. In each, a line of verse is a sentence, in that it contains a single thought. Reiteration is common in these works; rhyme is only occasional; and slang is an accepted

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<sup>184</sup> Anderson, Chants, p.13.

<sup>185</sup> See Eliot Perry's biography, Walt Whitman, p.187.



feature. The rhythm of the verses is that of the chants of the Old Testament.

A perusal of ten pages of Whitman's "Song of Myself"<sup>186</sup> reveals no "run-on" lines, while an investigation of the first eight poems in Mid-American Chants<sup>187</sup> (approximately equivalent to ten pages of Leaves of Grass) discloses only one such line:

Love,  
I awake.<sup>188</sup>

In both writers, as has been stated, reiteration is a common device. This repetition often occurs at the beginning of the lines; such as, Whitman's "And I" and "I will" in the poem, "Starting from Paumanok,"<sup>189</sup> and Anderson's "I want" and "Let" of his poem, "Song of the Middle World."<sup>190</sup>

A monstrously bad poem, "The Red-Throated Black," by Anderson, has the phrase, "Give me the word," repeated eighteen times in forty-five lines,<sup>191</sup> while Whitman's "Excelsior" of

<sup>186</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.24-33.

<sup>187</sup> Anderson, Chants, pp.11-24.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.21. Forty-nine poems appear in this volume, in which are found forty-seven "run-on" lines. None at all occurs in A New Testament.

<sup>189</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.14-15.

<sup>190</sup> Anderson, Chants, p.35.

<sup>191</sup> Anderson, Testament, pp.42-43.

20 NOVEMBER 1944 10:00 A.M. SJ

STORY AND THE MOLDERS WERE AT A LITTLE CHURCH

WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1850. THE CHURCH WAS BUILT IN

1850. IT IS A STONE CHURCH. IT IS A QUADRATIC CHURCH.

THEY ARE THE SAME PEOPLE WHO ARE NEEDING THE

2000 POUNDS OF COAL. THEY ARE GOING TO GET

THE COAL FROM THE COAL MINE WHICH IS LOCATED IN THE MOUNTAINS.

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twelve lines, incidentally just as bad, uses initial repetition for the entire poem.<sup>192</sup>

It must be admitted, however, that Whitman employs this device of reiteration to a much greater extent than does Anderson; yet, it must be remembered that the former wrote many more poems than the latter. That both fail in their attempt to use successfully such a device is to be expected. The monotony alone is sufficient to ruin the desired beauty or effect.

Whitman and Anderson were tremendously interested in words, especially those which were entirely native to America. The former wrote his An American Primer, in which he pleaded for a language in America suitable to all its industries and interests. Anderson throughout his autobiographies discusses his art as a writer and admits his keen interest in Gertrude Stein because of her unusual use of words.<sup>193</sup> He has written also a rather long poem entitled "Word Factories"<sup>194</sup> which, though exceedingly bad, is an expression of his own theory of the use of words.

Comparison of these two writers leads to the discovery of striking similarities in discussion of the function of words. Whitman has written:

<sup>192</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.397-398.

<sup>193</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.49.

<sup>194</sup> Anderson, Testament, pp.86-88.



A perfect writer would make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, bear children, weep, bleed, rage, stab, steal, fire cannon, steer ships, sack cities, charge with cavalry or infantry, or do anything, that man or woman or the natural powers can do.<sup>195</sup>

Anderson says:

Words are everything. I swear to you I have not lost my faith in words.

Do I not know? While I walked in the street there were such words came, in ordered array! I tell you what--words have color, smell; one may sometimes feel them with the fingers as one touches the cheek of a child.<sup>196</sup>

The latter deplores the fact that few native American words are used by American writers because of the fact that the English command our words and marshal them in too perfect order.<sup>197</sup> Whitman continually advocated the use of our own "aboriginal" words and slang; he has said: "I think I am done with many of the words of the past hundred centuries.--I am mad that their poems, bibles, words, still rule and represent earth, and are not yet superseded."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Whitman, Primer, p.16.

<sup>196</sup> Anderson, Story, p.291.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pp.360-361.

<sup>198</sup> Whitman, Primer, p.12.



Both authors were interested in the body and consequently desired expressive words for it. Anderson writes: "Words for every act of the body, for dark and gay thoughts";<sup>199</sup> and Whitman wrote: "A true composition in words, returns the human body, male or female--that is the most perfect composition and shall be best-loved by men and women, and shall last the longest, which slights no part of the body, and repeats no part of the body."<sup>200</sup>

Both men considered the negro an important factor in the formation of the American language.<sup>201</sup> Modern America was to be sung about with no regard for the respectability of the words used.<sup>202</sup>

Whitman was exceedingly fond of "aboriginal" names and used them profusely in his poetry; Anderson attempts, almost timidly it is true, to do the same thing. He says:

... Keokuk, Tennessee, Michigan,  
Chicago, Kalamazoo--don't the names  
in this country make you fairly drunk?<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Anderson, Notebook, p.135.

<sup>200</sup> Whitman, Primer, pp.27-28.

<sup>201</sup> See Anderson's book, Notebook, p.135 and Whitman's Primer, p.24.

<sup>202</sup> See Anderson's Notebook, p.135, and the entire volume of An American Primer by Whitman.

<sup>203</sup> Anderson, Chants, p.16.



Both writers speak of words as being "male and female," a conception not general to most people. That Anderson secured the idea from Whitman and enlarged upon it seems evident when his poem, "Word Factories," is studied.<sup>204</sup>

#### IV

#### Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter, Part I, attempts to show that American critics have connected Anderson with Whitman, both directly and indirectly, from 1918 to 1934, during the time in which their reviews appeared. These twenty-four critical analyses, however, presented no parallel passages from the works of the poets; thus, their decisions remain literary rather than scholarly.

An endeavor in Part II has been made also to verify Anderson's familiarity with the writings of Whitman. His autobiographies indicate that Anderson read avidly and that Whitman was included in his reading. He placed Whitman with Dreiser as the two foremost advocates for a better type of workman. In a criticism on a production of one of his contemporaries, Anderson declared that Whitman made "people clean and nice again."

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<sup>204</sup> See Whitman's Primer, p.25, and Anderson's Testament, p.86.



Anderson's introduction to Charles Cullen's illustrated Leaves of Grass contained high praise. "Whitman is in the bones of America," he announced. He called the good gray poet "the real American singer" and declared that America needs to return to the dreams and principles of Whitman.

In a personal letter written to the writer of this study Anderson indicated that he considered Whitman the most significant poet of the United States.

The third section of this chapter is subdivided into four parts; democracy, religion, sex, and verse technique. Parallel passages from Anderson and Whitman show a passionate interest and belief in democracy. Both writers accept and laud the mergence of the immigrants from many European nations into one great unit, America; but both insisted that this mergence be whole-hearted and complete. The faults and evils of this democracy, however, were recognized by these two far-seeing men. To them, materialism was perhaps the greatest transgression of democracy. Both authors deplored America's industrialism and standardization, although Anderson exceeded Whitman in bitterness against the latter phase, which was undoubtedly due to the fact that Whitman had seen only its origin and not its crest as Anderson had. These short-comings, however, seemed to them to be somewhat redeemed by the divinity within the workmen and the masses of the nation. These people, then, were to be the salvation of America's democracy.



Parallel to this conception of the purpose of mankind is their assumption of the personality and identity of other persons. All classes of people were included by them, probably with the intention of securing a more definite understanding of their theory of democracy on the part of their readers.

Religion, although far more important to Whitman, interested Anderson in somewhat the same way as it did the former. Both donned and doffed the cloak of Christ's personality as they desired; yet no sacrilege is apparent in either. Their mystical experiences are indeed comparable, but again Whitman excels in giving them moving expression. Both writers have the firm conviction of immortality with all its implication of personal contact with God and Christ after death. Both employ sexual imagery in their attempt to describe their religious reactions. Perhaps their most interesting mode of presenting their Christian faith is their self-identification with Christ, done in an amazingly devout fashion with no intention of mockery or profanation.

Changing conventions have brought with them a changed attitude toward sex. Whitman daringly wrote of the body and its functions and used sexual imagery, and Anderson followed in his trail. Physical love in all its phases, bad as well as good, is a part of our civilization and should be written of with utter frankness--such was the doctrine of these two authors. Both felt the sacredness of the human body and deplored the "Puritanism" of the average person. To them parenthood

the first time in the history of the world that a man has been able to do this.

He has done it by the use of a new method of surgery which has been developed by himself.

He has also developed a new method of treatment for cancer which has been found to be very effective.

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is sacred and the highest calling of mankind. Both employ symbols taken from nature to describe physical love.

Noticeable too is their frank treatment of the prostitute who has her place in society; no attempt is made by either to excuse, reject, or decry her.

The love of man for man, or "amativeness" as the phrenologists have termed it, was considered by Whitman to be vital to the principle of democracy, but Anderson's attitude as compared with his predecessor's seems passive and ineffectual, which may be the result of imitation as opposed to sincere personal belief.

To turn from content to form the reader discovers that Anderson has followed Whitman's verse technique rather closely in his Mid-American Chants and A New Testament. So-called "run-on" lines occur very rarely in their poetry, each line of verse containing one thought. The repetition of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences are typical of both poets. Rhyme is only occasional and when it does appear seems to be accidental rather than purposeful. The rhythm of their poetry is similar to that of the chants found in the Old Testament. It is indeed significant, moreover, that no other American poet between Whitman and Anderson used this particular type of verse technique.

Both Whitman and Anderson were keenly interested in words, employing slang frequently and "aboriginal" words, as Whitman referred to them. Both desired freedom from the sedate language

RECEIVED. 1. DATA. 2. AGED. 3. NAME. 4. ADDRESS.

5. GENDER. 6. COLOR. 7. SIZE. 8. WEIGHT.

9. DISEASES. 10. INJURIES. 11. HABITS.

12. PREGNANCY. 13. PAST HISTORY.

14. PAST MEDICAL HISTORY. 15. PAST SURGICAL HISTORY.

16. PAST OBSTETRICAL HISTORY. 17. PAST MEDICAL HISTORY.

18. PAST SURGICAL HISTORY. 19. PAST OBSTETRICAL HISTORY.

20. PAST OBSTETRICAL HISTORY. 21. PAST MEDICAL HISTORY.

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60. PAST OBSTETRICAL HISTORY. 61. PAST MEDICAL HISTORY.

used by the English, advocating the use of terms suitable to all the interests and industries of America as a separate, proud nation. Americanized words were the goal of these two writers.

Here has been presented, then, those similarities and comparisons which may be made between Whitman and Anderson. No attempt has been made to prove that Anderson kept Whitman by him constantly as he wrote, but that he remembered the writings of his predecessor seems evident. The parallels indicated are of exceedingly great interest to the student of American literature, for in them is reasonable evidence of the far-reaching influence of Walt Whitman. That there is an astonishing amount of Whitman's theories and principles in Anderson is obvious, and perhaps not surprising in one who has written, "I think that any American writer who was not influenced by Walt Whitman would be dead to the work of our most significant poet."



### Chapter III

#### Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg

##### I

###### American Criticisms of Sandburg

The appearance of Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems in 1916 gave critics ample opportunity for turbulent, contradictory charges, but they did agree upon one point--Sandburg's brutality. It remained for Louis Untermeyer two years later, however, to comment upon the poet's marked resemblance in content and style to Walt Whitman. To this critic, Sandburg's poems in Chicago Poems (1916) and Cornhuskers (1918) seemed "a direct answer to Whitman's hope of a democratic poetry that would express itself in a democratic and even a distinctly American speech."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Louis Untermeyer, "Strong Timber," in The Dial, lxv (1918), 264.



Two years later Paul L. Benjamin dwelt upon Sandburg's love of the commonplace and his unusual use of words, both traits of Whitman, and aptly compared the excellent poetic melody created by the two poets.<sup>206</sup>

The following year Paul Rosenfield declared that Sandburg was "doing in his Chicago of the new century what Whitman was doing in the Manhattan of Civil War times: burning the mists off the befogged land, striving to create out of the inanimate steel and the loveless dirt, the living thing America."<sup>207</sup> He, too, marked the unusual humanity of Sandburg and his ardent desire to represent the common laborer. This critic referred to the occasional flashes of genius leaping out of "chaos," an observation justly applicable to Whitman.<sup>208</sup> Sandburg, to him, was one of the "poet-priests of America," the first who in general had brought "the sound of voices singing beautifully," and who breathed "the salt, pungent perfume of our soil."<sup>209</sup>

Another reviewer, Walter Yust, remarked that Sandburg was considered by Europeans as the most authentic voice of America since Whitman, whose An American Primer seemed to call for just

<sup>206</sup> Paul L. Benjamin, "A Poet of the Common-Place," in The Survey, xlv (1920), 12-13.

<sup>207</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, "Carl Sandburg," in The Bookman, liii (1921), 389.

<sup>208</sup> See ibid., liii, 393.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., liii, 395. Compare with Whitman's theory of the poet's duty in his Preface of 1855 (Whitman, Leaves, pp.488-507).



such a fearless user of words.<sup>210</sup>

An anonymous review appeared in The New York Times (reprinted in The Bookman) in which was discussed the Whitmanic catalogues of Sandburg. The declaration was made that since "no writer is without a literary tradition or literary influences of some sort, because no one writes without previously reading," Sandburg's tradition is "Whitman, journalism, and to a slighter extent modern vers libre poets, just as Whitman's tradition was journalism and prose translations of epic poetry."<sup>211</sup> To this critic all of Sandburg's pages displayed indebtedness to Whitman, "even to the extent of using phrases from Leaves of Grass--'hairy, hankering.'"<sup>212</sup>

In 1922 Percy H. Boynton remarked that Sandburg, even as Dante, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Whitman, used language suitable to the subject under treatment,<sup>213</sup> but Carl Van Doren felt that Sandburg's pity for the common people often carried him to the point of bathos "so that, as Whitman did before him, he runs into long lists of objects" which overtax his imaginative power.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Walter Yust, "Carl Sandburg, Human Being," in The Bookman, lii (1921), 285-290.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., lii, 232-233.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., lii, 233.

<sup>213</sup>Percy H. Boynton, "The Voice of Chicago: Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg," in The English Journal, xi (1922), 610-620.

<sup>214</sup>Carl Van Doren, "Flame and Slag; Carl Sandburg: Poet with Both Fists," in The Century, cvi (1923), 789.



Harry Hansen, on the other hand, even though he did admit that many of Sandburg's poems were prose especially those containing summaries or catalogues in the Whitman manner refused to see very much of Whitman in his works: "He is not derivative even though he is often spoken of as the most successful follower of Whitman; he read Whitman early in his career but there is little of him in his poetry."<sup>215</sup>

But Louis Untermeyer disagreed with Hansen declaring that Sandburg's "creative use of proper names and slang, the interlarding of cheapness and nobility which is Sandburg's highly personal idiom, would have given great joy to Whitman,"<sup>216</sup> and that "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter" seemed "almost a direct answer to Whitman's insistence that before the coming poets could become powerful, they would have to learn the use of hard powerful words; the greatest artists are, he affirmed, always simple and direct, never merely 'polite or obscure.' He loved violence in language."<sup>217</sup> Untermeyer continued that Sandburg's most characteristic idiom--the blending of proper names and slang--would have delighted Whitman.<sup>218</sup> In a later

<sup>215</sup> Harry Hansen, Midwest Portraits: A Book of Memoirs and Friendships, New York [1923], pp.58-59.

<sup>216</sup> Louis Untermeyer, The New Era in American Poetry, New York, 1919, p.98.

<sup>217</sup> Untermeyer, New Era, p.100.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p.107.



criticism this critic described Sandburg as "a laureate of the dusk, and in him, as in Whitman, Night finds her passionate celebrant."<sup>219</sup>

In his volume, Modern American Poetry, Untermeyer wrote that the poems of Sandburg were undoubtedly indebted to Whitman; that they were "less sweeping but more varied"; and that they musically marked a great advance.<sup>220</sup>

Clement Wood labeled Sandburg "A Hymn from Hogwallow" and compared the first thirty-seven years of his life among the working men with that of Whitman. He quoted the first few lines from "Chicago,"<sup>221</sup> following it with these comments: "He has qualities here that Whitman lacks: a more shaped music, a vision closer to actual people. He has faults which Whitman lacked: a scantiness of vista, a skill in detail which fails before totality."<sup>222</sup> He declared that Whitman's use of unfamiliar rhythms prevented his recognition just as Sandburg's peculiar rhythms and slang disrupts his place in literature.<sup>223</sup>

The Van Doren brothers recognized Sandburg's love and

<sup>219</sup> Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry since 1900, New York, 1923, p.84.

<sup>220</sup> Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry: a Critical Anthology (Third revised edition), New York [1925], p.

<sup>221</sup> This poem is from Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems, New York, 1916, p.3.

<sup>222</sup> Clement Wood, Poets of America, New York [1925], p.250.

<sup>223</sup> See ibid., pp.260-261.



tenderness for humanity, his range of sympathies, and his use of common words but made no attempt to make the popular comparison with Whitman.<sup>224</sup>

Joseph Warren Beach admitted that the poet was largely affected by Whitman in his spirit and words, but indicated that Sandburg was more interested in form than was his predecessor. He recorded that "Sandburg proposes in one of his poems, 'chants that repeat and wave.' He is thinking perhaps of something in music, or more likely of Whitman's 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.' or 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed.'<sup>225</sup>"

In 1926 Harriet Monroe, editor of the magazine in which the poetry of Sandburg first appeared, dwelt upon his art at some length in her Poets and Their Art (1926). She ranked his lyrics among the finest in the language, noted his employment of slang, and complimented his masterly use of refrain, but she did not directly compare him with Whitman.<sup>226</sup>

Finally in 1928 appeared an article by Esther Lolita Holcomb in which she compared the leading characteristics of subject matter and style of the two poets: fidelity to the present, concrete pictures, Americanism, catalogues, long sentences.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>224</sup>Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature since 1890, New York and London [1925], pp.31-35.

<sup>225</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, The Outlook for American Prose, Chicago [1926], p.259.

<sup>226</sup>Harriet Monroe, Poets and Their Art, New York, 1926, pp. 29-38.

<sup>227</sup>Esther Lolita Holcomb, "Whitman and Sandburg," in The English Journal, xvii (1928), 550-551.



The major portion of her article, however, is concerned with contrasting the finer points of the two writers.<sup>228</sup>

During the same year T. K. Whipple in his book Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life criticized Sandburg severely, finding his poetry seldom finished. Selection of sentences here and there through the chapter indicate that the same criticisms would be applicable to Whitman: "His poetry teems with concrete images of an unusual vividness"; "at his best he has tremendous passionate energy, but his energy is intermittent"; "nothing exercises a stronger fascination, whether attractive or repulsive, over his imagination than death"; and again his "rhythm is uncertain."<sup>229</sup> This critic declared his disbelief in Sandburg's being a "mystic of the cosmic or pantheistic sort, like Walt Whitman" for the former is a skeptic.<sup>230</sup>

Alfred Kreymborg, however, recognized Sandburg as Whitman's "leading descendant," to use his own phrase, with certain reservations, for the contemporary poet seemed to him to fall below Whitman in sustaining a theme at great length. This critic discovered, however, that Sandburg had "humanized Imagism and tempered Walt's passionate creed with the salt of

<sup>228</sup>

Holcomb, "Whitman and Sandburg," pp.551-555.

<sup>229</sup> T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life, New York and London, 1928, pp.167,170,174,171 respectively.

<sup>230</sup>

Ibid., p.181.



irony. One has a feeling that Sandburg is closer than Whitman to people as they are. He loves them as romantically, but not quite so blindly. Walt was the prophet of the race, Walt himself was democracy. Sandburg is the bard of the race, the lyric companion of its by no means perfect character.<sup>231</sup> A comparison of their patriotism led Kreymborg to realize the equality of the patriotic feeling displayed by the two poets.<sup>232</sup>

With the same year 1930 came fewer articles but all acknowledged marked similarity between these two poets. J. V. Nash, who called Sandburg "an American Homer," admitted that at times in his poetry "the Whitman note sounds out unmistakably, as in the following lines from 'Prairie,' the first poem in Cornhuskers:

I speak of new cities and new people.  
 I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.  
 I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down,  
 a sun dropped in the west.  
 I tell you there is nothing in the world  
 only an ocean of to-morrows,  
 a sky of to-morrows!"<sup>233</sup>

Another critic, William B. Cairns, remarked that "Sandburg is more frankly and obviously a follower of Whitman, as

<sup>231</sup> Alfred Kreymborg, Our Singing Strength, New York, 1929, p. 386.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>233</sup> J. V. Nash, "Carl Sandburg: an American Homer," in Open Court, xliv (1930), 638. The excerpt is from Carl Sandburg's Cornhuskers, New York, 1918, p. 11.



he understands Whitman, than most recent poets. He is characterized by radical social ideas, by the use of free measures, both those suggested by Whitman and short-line lyric forms, and by a vocabulary that is coarseness and slang that often goes beyond that of his master.<sup>234</sup> He noted, too, that "the picture of the proletariat using his own idiom must be corrected by that of the poet with his guitar chanting his verses to afternoon crowds of admiring ladies. Whitman showed similar contradictions."<sup>235</sup>

A. C. Ward in 1932 considered Sandburg's free verse inferior to Whitman's, for the latter had greater power of vision and of rhythm.<sup>236</sup>

Then the next year Granville Hicks declared that Sandburg "like Whitman, had written for the common people, not as they are, but as they may become."<sup>237</sup>

That there have been numerous other reviews and criticisms is obvious, but only those which couple Whitman and Sandburg in some manner have been considered here. Of the twenty-five discussions included, thirteen appeared within a period of six

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William B. Cairns, A History of American Literature, New York, 1930, p.541.

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Ibid., p.542.

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A. C. Ward, American Literature: 1880-1930, London [1932], p.170.

237

Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition, New York, 1933, p.242.



years, 1921-1926, at which time the vers libre movement became a part of American literature. Since that time Sandburg's popularity has wavered from high to low; but, nevertheless, he has very definitely established himself as a poet to be reckoned with in America and even in Europe, where he is considered our most authentic voice.<sup>238</sup>

Perhaps more contradictory criticisms have been written concerning Sandburg than any other poet of the 1900's, with the possible exception of Emily Dickinson. Epithets ranging from "exquisite" to "brutal" have been applied to his poetry. All the other critics, however, agree upon his excellent unusual use of words, words of the lyric and words of the street. No poet, to them, has employed slang quite as effectively. The majority of them agree, too, that he has a great love and pity for the common people. But continued warfare is waged over his poetic talents; some, such as Louis Untermeyer, Harriet Monroe, Paul L. Benjamin, Paul Rosenfeld, Carl Van Doren, and Alfred Kreymborg, consider Sandburg a great poet. Others, among whom are Esther Lolita Holcomb, the reviewer for The New York Times in 1921, Clement Wood, Joseph Warren Beach, and T. K. Whipple, regard him as inferior to Whitman. The remainder of the critics present his excellences and his faults, usually making no attempt to place him in any particular category.

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<sup>238</sup> See Walter Yust's article, "Carl Sandburg, Human Being," in The Bookman, lii (1921), 285.



None of the critics, however, attempts the citation of comparable passages from the two poets. True, they quote excerpts from Sandburg which have general resemblances to Whitman, but no specific comparisons have been made. That Sandburg has read Whitman and has been influenced by him is indeed evident, but the significance of this influence must be carefully considered before a definite decision concerning their relationship may be made.

## II

### Sandburg's Opinion of Whitman

The writings of Carl Sandburg are very sparse in their reference to Walt Whitman. In an introduction to a collection of Whitman's poems published by the Modern Library,<sup>239</sup> Sandburg carefully refrains from indicating in any way his own indebtedness to this great poet of the 'fifties; nevertheless, he does make a few rather significant statements. He writes:

In certain particulars Walt Whitman's book, "Leaves of Grass," stands by itself and is the most peculiar and noteworthy monument amid the work of American literature.

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<sup>239</sup> Walt Whitman, Poems, New York, n.d., pp.iii-xi. The Modern Library Series.



First, as to style. In a large and growing circle of readers and critics, it is regarded as the most original book, the most decisively individual, the most sublimely personal creation in American literary art.

Second, as to handling by critics and commentators. It is the most highly praised and most deeply damned book that ever came from an American printing press as the work of an American writer; no other book can compete with it in the number of bouquets handed it by distinguished bystanders on one side of the street and in the number of hostile and nasty brickbats flung by equally distinguished bystanders on the other side of the street.

Third, as to personality. It is the most intensely personal book in American literature, living grandly to its promissory line, "who touches this touches a man," spilling its multitude of confessions with the bravery of a first-rate autobiography.

Fourth, as to scope of life work. It packs within its covers, does "Leaves of Grass," the life and thought and feeling of one man; it was first published when the author was 36 years of age and he actually never wrote another book even though he lived to be 73 years of age; what he did all the rest of his life after publishing the first edition of "Leaves of Grass," was to rewrite and extend the first book.

Fifth, as to literary rank abroad. No other American poet, except Poe, has the name, the persistent audiences across decades of time, and the pervasive influence, credited to Walt Whitman as an American writer, an American force in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the archipelagoes of the sea.

Sixth, as to influence in America. No other American book has so persistent a crowd of friends, advocates and sponsors as that which from decade to decade carries on the ballyhoo for "Leaves of Grass"; in Chicago, as an instance, Walt Whitman is the only dead or living American author whose memory is kept by an informal organization that memorializes its hero with an annual dinner.



Seventh, as to Americanism. "Leaves of Grass" is the most wildly keyed solemn oath that America means something and is going somewhere that has ever been written; it is America's most classic advertisement of itself as having purpose, destiny, manners and beaconsfires.

Therefore--because of the foregoing seven itemized points--and because there are further points into which the annals might be lengthened--and because still furthermore there are great and mystic points of contact that cannot be captured in itemized information--therefore "Leaves of Grass" is a book to be owned, kept, loaned, fought over, and read till it is dog-eared and dirty all over.<sup>240</sup>

This is indeed high praise. Undoubtedly Sandburg knew Whitman thoroughly; otherwise such compact criticism could not come from his pen. But that laudation, seemingly insufficient, was extended to:

Walt Whitman is the only established epic poet of America. He is the single American figure that both American and European artists and critics most often put in a class or throw into a category with Shakespeare, Dante, Homer. He is the one American writer that Emerson, Burroughs, John Muir, Edward Carpenter, and similar observers enter in their lists as having a size in history and an importance of utterance that places him with Socrates, Confucious, Lao Tse, and the silver-gray men of the half-worlds who left the Bhagavad Gita and writings known most often as sacred.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Whitman, Poems, pp. iii-v.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. vi.



of particular poems by Whitman, Sandburg considers "Song of the Open Road" the best single characteristic and authentic one, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" the most majestic threnody to death in the English language, and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" the most haunting.<sup>242</sup> He further asserts that in Leaves of Grass occur masterpieces of the art of poetry, which may very favorably be compared with the verse of foreign lands.<sup>243</sup>

Was Whitman the projector of Sandburg? Let us examine and compare the works of these two poets before a decision is offered.

### III

#### A Comparison of the Writings of Sandburg and Whitman

In the year 1904 a small pamphlet entitled In Reckless Ecstasy was printed by the Asgrad Press in Galesburg, Ohio, under the sponsorship of Philip Green Wright, an instructor of English at Lombard College. This small paper-backed affair constituted the first volume of verse produced by Carl Sandburg. Included in the edition was a portrait of its author by Wright,

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<sup>242</sup> Whitman, Poems, p. viii.

<sup>243</sup> See ibid., p. ix.



his instructor, whose most significant remark read: "He reads everything: Boccaccio, Walt Whitman, Emerson, Tolstoi, and enters with appreciation and sympathetic enthusiasm into all that he reads."<sup>244</sup> During his middle twenties, then, the formative period of youth, Sandburg was absorbing Whitman--and Emerson, too, whom the latter so much admired.

In order to determine the influence which Whitman may have had on Sandburg as a mature poet, this section will be divided into four parts: democracy, religion, sex, and verse technique. The parallels presented in this chapter indicate certain resemblances between the two poets, but it must be remembered that influences of any kind cannot be proved. Some of the comparisons drawn may seem somewhat inappropriate, but they are included because of the interest which they have to the student of American literature.

#### A. Democracy

Whitman's Leaves of Grass glorifies democracy in all its numerous phases. Here is celebrated the equality of men and women, the divinity of the masses, and the hope of universal, as well as national, brotherhood. Sandburg, with volumes such

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<sup>244</sup>Hansen, Portraits, p. 37.

the club as a bunch of old-timers has nothing to offer the younger

men.

and the whole organization is going to be reorganized

and the new club will be called the "Young Men's Club".

and the new club will be called the "Young Men's Club".

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as Chicago Poems (1916), Smoke and Steel (1921), and Corn-huskers (1918), particularizes these theories and writes of definite sections or people in the United States. / Whitman had written that "the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons some more and some less to bear on your individual character as you hear or read";<sup>245</sup> Sandburg attempts to do just that.

In Whitman's "O Magnet-South" and in Sandburg's "Prairie" these poets, in endeavoring to follow their theories, fall somewhat short in sustained effect. Proper names, lengthy sentences, and catalogues characterize their style. The purposes of the two poets were identical: Whitman wrote of the South because of the Civil War; Sandburg wrote of the West because of its development and exploitation during this period. Occasional similarity in thought is observable. Whitman had written:

O dear to me my birth-things--all  
moving things and the trees  
where I was born--the grains,  
plants, rivers,<sup>246</sup>

and Sandburg echoes the thought in this way:

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<sup>245</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.495.

<sup>246</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.393, from "O Magnet-South."



I was born on the prairie and the  
milk of its wheat, the red of  
its clover, the eyes of its  
women, gave me a song and a  
slogan.<sup>247</sup>

Whitman, however, though his poem is sentimental, in the  
lines

A Kentucky corn-field, the tall,  
graceful, long-leav'd corn,  
slender, flapping, bright  
green, with tassels, with  
beautiful ears each well-  
sheath'd in its husk,<sup>248</sup>

surpasses Sandburg who writes:

On the left- and right-hand side  
of the road,  
Marching corn--  
I saw it knee high weeks ago--now  
it is head high--tassels of red  
silk creep at the ends of the  
ears.<sup>249</sup>

Comparatively little of Sandburg's poetry, however, is  
written in celebration of the beauty and grandeur of America,  
for, bitterly resenting the repression of the poor by the rich,

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<sup>247</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.3, from "Prairie."

<sup>248</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.394.

<sup>249</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.8.



he lashes out against injustice in such poems as "Smoke and Steel" from the book of that title, "Legends" and "Cartoon" from Cornhuskers, and the title poem of Good Morning, America. Whitman, too, recognized the faults of democracy and warned his readers against them in Democratic Vistas,<sup>250</sup> but this displeasure seldom appears in his poetry which retains a buoyant optimism throughout. Salvation, he believed, lay in the hands of the working class--the mob. His two poems, "Song of the Broad-Axe" and "Song of the Exposition,"<sup>251</sup> celebrate the laborer and attempt "to teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade."<sup>252</sup> Sandburg's "I Am the People, the Mob" imparts the same philosophy. It reads:

I am the people--the mob--the crowd--the mass.  
 Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?  
 I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.  
 I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die, And then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.  
 I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much

<sup>250</sup> See pages 45-47 of this thesis concerning the attitude of Whitman toward the democratic principles of his era.

<sup>251</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.156-174.

<sup>252</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.171, from "Song of the Exposition."



plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have. And I forget.

Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then--I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool--then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.

The mob--the crowd--the mass--will arrive then. 253

Whitman, in one of his occasional moments of poetic bitterness, penned these lines:

Let there be no suggestion above  
the suggestion of drudgery!  
Let none be pointed toward his  
destination! (Say! do you  
know your destination?) 254

which quite possibly may have been the germ for Sandburg's little poem "Omaha":

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253 Sandburg, Chicago, p.172.

254 Whitman, Leaves, p.470, from "Respondez!"



Red barns and red heifers spot the  
green grass circles around Omaha--  
the farmers haul tanks of cream  
and wagon loads of cheese.

Shale hogbacks across the river  
at Council Bluffs--and shanties  
hang by an eyelash to the hill  
slants back around Omaha.

A span of steel ties up the kin  
of Iowa and Nebraska across the  
yellow, big-roofed Missouri River.

Omaha, the roughneck, feeds  
armies,  
Eats and swears from a dirty face.  
Omaha works to get the world a  
breakfast. 255

Steeped in irony, the graphic pictures of this short poem  
convey to us in subtle fashion the drudgery of the farmers and  
workers in the vicinity of this city, in a manner greatly  
superior to Whitman, it is true.

Sandburg has also written this graphic line from "Masses":

And then one day I got a true look  
at the Poor, millions of the Poor,  
patient and toiling; more patient  
than crags, tides, and stars; in-  
numerable, patient as the darkness  
of night--and all broken, humble  
ruins of nations. 256

His "Mill-Doors" breathes the atmosphere of hopelessness for

255 Carl Sandburg, Smoke and Steel, New York, 1921, p.26.

256 Sandburg, Chicago, p.6.



the lot of the laborer:

You never come back.  
 I say good-by when I see you going  
     in the doors,  
 The hopeless open doors that call  
     and wait  
 And take you then for--how many  
     cents a day?  
 How many cents for the sleepy eyes  
     and fingers?

I say good-by because I know they  
     tap your wrists,  
 In the dark, in the silence, day  
     by day,  
 And all the blood of you drop by drop,  
 And you are old before you are young.  
 You never come back.<sup>257</sup>

The poem, "They Will Say," however, is a bitter seathing attack upon the evils of the city:

of my city the worst that men will  
     evrysay is this:  
 You took little children away from  
     the sun and the dew,  
 And the glimmers that played in the  
     grass under the great sky,  
 And the reckless rain; you put them  
     between walls  
 To work, broken and smothered, for  
     bread and wages,  
 To eat dust in their throats and  
     die empty-hearted  
 For a little handful of pay on a  
     few Saturday nights.<sup>258</sup>

<sup>257</sup> Sandburg, Chicago, p.10.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p.9.



Whitman's poem, "I Sit and Look Out," expresses a quieter recognition of these evils:

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame,  
 I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done,  
 I see in low life the mother mistreated by her children, dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate.  
 I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous seducer of young women,  
 I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to be hid, I see these sights on the earth,  
 I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and prisoners,  
 I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,  
 I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;  
 All these--all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,  
 See, hear, and am silent. <sup>259</sup>

To turn from America as an industrial and agricultural nation, the student finds these two poets intensely interested in war. Whitman, though not an active soldier, acted as

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259 Whitman, Leaves, p. 232.



unofficial nurse in the hospitals and army camps. His experiences and reactions may be found in Leaves of Grass, particularly in the section known as "Drum-Taps." Sandburg, too, wrote poems concerning the World War, although he did not go abroad. He did, however, serve in Porto Rico during the Spanish-American war so that he too knew the horrors of war. Perhaps the most famous of the latter's war poems is "Grass," the fundamental roots of which undoubtedly grew out of Whitman, whose repetition of such phrases as "good grass," "the good clean grass," "good green grass," and "curling grass" has been marked by many of his readers.

Sandburg's poem reads:

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz  
and Waterloo.  
Shovel them under and let me work--  
I am the grass; I cover all.  
  
And pile them high at Gettysburg  
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.  
Shovel them under and let me work.  
Two years, ten years, and passengers  
ask the conductor:  
    What place is this?  
    Where are we now?  
  
I am the grass.  
Let me work.<sup>260</sup>

That Whitman was the originator of such an attitude is evident

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<sup>260</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.126.



from the passages which follow. In "Song of Myself" is found his most beautiful expression of the work of the grass:

And now it seems to me the beautiful  
uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling  
grass,  
It may be you transpire from the  
breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I  
would have loved them,  
It may be you are from old people,  
or from offspring taken soon  
out of their mothers' laps,  
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from  
the white heads of old mothers,  
Darker than the colorless beards  
of old men,  
Dark to come from under the faint  
red roofs of mouths.<sup>261</sup>

Toward the end of his life he published the poem "By Broad  
Potomac's Shore," which closed with these lines:

Give me of you O spring, before I  
close, to put between its pages!  
O forenoon purple of the hills, be-  
fore I close, of you!  
O deathless grass, of you!<sup>262</sup>

✓ Parades witnessed by these two poets in Boston and Washington, D. C. inspired the satirical verses of Whitman's "A

<sup>261</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p. 28.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 400.



"Boston Ballad" and Sandburg's "And So To-day." That Sandburg echoed the unusual figure of his predecessor seems quite likely when the two poems are examined. Whitman in 1854 had written:

Why this is indeed a show--it has  
called the dead out of the earth!  
The old graveyards of the hills  
have hurried to see!  
Phantoms! phantoms countless by  
flank and rear!  
Cock'd hats of nothy mould--crutches  
made of mist!  
Arms in slings--old men leaning on  
young men's shoulders.

What troubles you Yankee phantoms?  
what is all this chattering of  
bare gums?  
Does the ague convulse your limbs?  
do you mistake your crutches  
for firelocks and level them?<sup>263</sup>

Sandburg, in describing the magnificent procession to the tomb of the unknown soldier, penned these lines:

Skeleton men and boys riding skeleton  
horses,  
the rib bones shine, the rib bones curve,  
shine with savage, elegant curves--  
a jawbone runs with a long white slant,  
a skull dome runs with a long white arch,  
bone triangles click and rattle,  
elbows, ankles, white line slants--  
shining in the sun, past the White House,  
past the Treasury Building, Army and  
Navy Buildings,  
on to the mystic white Capitol Dome--

---

<sup>263</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p. 225.



so they go down Pennsylvania Avenue  
 to-day,  
 skeleton men and boys riding  
 skeleton horses,  
 stems of roses in their teeth,  
 rose dark leaves at their white jaw  
 slants--  
 and a horse laugh question nickers  
 and whinnies,  
 moans with a whistle out of horse  
 head teeth:  
 why? who? where?<sup>264</sup>

That both poets bitterly opposed war is obvious upon consideration of their war poetry, particularly "Drum-Taps" by Whitman and "War Poems" by Sandburg.<sup>265</sup> Their portrayal of the horrors of war, brutal as it may seem, merits admiration.

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln following the Civil War seemed to Whitman a great tragedy and the section, "Memories of President Lincoln,"<sup>266</sup> contains two of his finest poems, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "O Captain! My Captain!." Sandburg, too, has numerous references to Lincoln in his own poetry. A particularly beautiful line from "Potomac River Mist" reads:

The path of a night fog swept up  
 the river to the Lincoln Me-  
 morial when I saw it again and

<sup>264</sup> Carl Sandburg, Slabs of the Sunburnt West, New York [1922], pp.20-21.

<sup>265</sup> These sections are found in Whitman's Leaves, pp.237-299, and in Sandburg's Chicago, pp.85-96.

<sup>266</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp.276-285.



alone at a winter's end, the  
marble in the mist white as a  
blond woman's arm.<sup>267</sup>

His short poem, "Fire-Logs," concerns the mother of Lincoln,<sup>268</sup>  
and his "Knucks" is an ironical picture of a store in Spring-  
field, Illinois, the opening lines of which read:

In Abraham Lincoln's city,  
Where they remember his lawyer's  
shingle,  
The place where they brought him  
Wrapped in battle flags,  
Wrapped in the smoke of memories  
From Tallahassee to the Yukon,  
The place now where the shaft of  
his tomb  
Points white against the blue  
prairie dome,  
In Abraham Lincoln's city . . .  
I saw knucks  
In the window of Mister Fischman's  
second-hand store  
On Second Street.<sup>269</sup>

Both poets desired and prophesied international under-  
standing. Whitman's short poem, "This Moment Yearning and  
Thoughtful," expresses keen desire for universal brotherhood:

This moment yearning and thoughtful  
sitting alone,

---

<sup>267</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.175.

<sup>268</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.46.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p.88. Knucks are "brass knuckles."



It seems to me there are other men  
in other lands yearning and  
thoughtful,  
It seems to me I can look over and  
behold them in Germany, Italy,  
France, Spain,  
Or far, far away, in Chinca, or in  
Russia or Japan, talking other  
dialects,  
And it seems to me if I could know  
those men I should become at-  
tached to them as I do to men in  
my own lands,  
O I know we should be brethren and  
lovers,  
I know I should be happy with them. <sup>270</sup>

His long poem, "Passage to India," although allegorical, proph-  
esies intellectual, as well as physical, union of the East and  
West. <sup>271</sup>

Sandburg's poem, "The Four Brothers," also prophesies  
future peaceful association of all nations. Excerpts from this  
poem read:

Look! It is four brothers in joined  
hands together.  
The people of bleeding France,  
The people of Britain, the  
people of America--  
These are the four brothers, these  
are the four republics. <sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.107.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp.343-351. The allegorical meaning: man's long  
search for an all-water passage to India typifies the soul's  
long and baffled search for truth and for God.

<sup>272</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.143.



Good-night is the word, good-night  
 to the kings, to the czars,  
 Good-night to the kaiser.  
 The breakdown and the fade-away begins.  
 The shadow of a great broom, ready to  
 sweep out the trash, is here.<sup>273</sup>

Out of the wild finger-writing north  
 and south, east and west, over  
 the blood-crossed, blood-dusty  
 ball of earth,  
 Out of it all a God who knows is  
 sweeping clean,  
 Out of it all a God who sees and  
 pierces through, is breaking and  
 cleaning out an old thousand years,  
 is making ready for a new thousand  
 years.  
 The four brothers shall be five and  
 more.

Under the chimneys of the winter  
 time the children of the world  
 shall sing new songs.  
 Among the rocking restless cradles  
 the mothers of the world shall  
 sing new sleepy-time songs.<sup>274</sup>

A study of this doctrine of brotherhood leads the reader to discover that Whitman sincerely believed in his ability to assume the identities of other men and women;<sup>275</sup> Sandburg follows his predecessor in this creed only occasionally. The latter's poem, "Old Times," undoubtedly has its origin in Whitman:

<sup>273</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.144.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>275</sup> See the quotation from Whitman's Leaves in this thesis, pp.55-56.



I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was  
a cleaner of pans.

On the march of Miltiades' phalanx  
I had a haft and head;  
I had a bristling gleaming spear-  
handle.

Red-headed Caesar picked me for a  
teamster.

He said, "Go to work, you Tuscan  
bastard,  
Rome calls for a man who can drive  
horses."

The units of conquest led by Charles  
the Twelfth,  
The whirling whimsical Napoleonic  
columns:  
They saw me one of the horseshoers.

Lincoln said, "Get into the game;  
your nation takes you."  
And I drove a wagon and team and I  
had my arm shot off  
At Spottsylvania Court House.

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.<sup>276</sup>

But Whitman too had written:

I am an old artillerist, I tell of  
my fort's bombardment,  
I am there again.

Again the long roll of the drummers,  
Again the attacking cannon, mortars,  
Again to my listening ears the cannon  
responsive.<sup>277</sup>

<sup>276</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.129.

<sup>277</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.57, from "Song of Myself."



Sandburg assumes the identity of a married woman in his short poem: "Two Strangers Breakfast":

The law says you and I belong to  
each other, George.  
The law says you are mine and I am  
yours, George.  
And there are a million miles of  
white snowstorms, a million fur-  
naces of hell,  
Between the chair where you sit and  
the chair where I sit.  
The law says two strangers shall eat  
breakfast together after nights,<sup>278</sup>  
on the horn of an Arctic moon.

Yet years before Whitman had written of himself as being different women in this manner:

It is my face yellow and wrinkled  
instead of the old woman's,  
I sit low in a straw-bottom chair  
and carefully darn my grandson's  
stockings.

It is I too, the sleepless widow  
looking out on the winter mid-  
night,  
I see the sparkles of starshine,<sup>279</sup>  
on the icy and pallid earth.

---

<sup>278</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p. 205.

<sup>279</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p. 257.



### B. Religion

Whitman believed in the Divinity and in the immortality of man. To him, the body, as well as the soul, was sacred and death was hailed by this poet as "lovely" and "welcome." He attempted to place God and Christ on an equal basis with man and at times identified himself with the Savior. His use of sexual imagery to express certain religious mystical experiences has disturbed many of his readers:<sup>280</sup> nevertheless, Whitman's God is all-powerful, human, and understanding.

Sandburg's references to God and Christ are numerous, but nowhere in his poetry does he attempt to assume the Sacred Identity. He does, however, endeavor to make the Divinity comprehensible and living to the common people. He writes:

I have looked over the earth and  
seen the swarming of different  
people to a different God--  
White men with prayers to a white  
God, black men with prayers to  
a black God, yellow-faces before  
altars to a yellow-face God--  
Amid burning fires they have pic-  
tured God with a naked skin; amid  
frozen rocks they have pictured  
God clothed and shaggy as a  
polar bear--  
I have met stubs of men broken in  
the pain and mutilation of war  
saying God is forgetful and too  
far off, too far away--

---

<sup>280</sup> See Whitman, Leaves, p.27, Section 5; p.32, Section 11; p.72, Section 48.



I have met people saying they talk with God face to face; they tell God, hello God and how are you God; they get familiar with God and hold intimate conversations-- Yet I have met other people saying they are afraid to see God face to face for they would ask questions even as God might ask them questions. 281

Previously Whitman had written:

I see the place of the idea of the Deity incarnated by avatars in human forms,  
 I see the spots of the successions of priests on the earth, oracles, sacrifices, brahmins, sabians, llamas, monks, mafatis, exhorters, I see where the druids walk'd the groves of Mona, I see the mistle-toe and vervain,  
 I see the temples of the deaths of the bodies of Gods, I see the old signifiers.  
 I see Christ eating the bread of his last supper in the midst of youths and old persons,... 282

The numerous references to Christ found in the poetry of Sandburg are astonishing in one called "brutal." His poem, "Loin Cloth," although not finely executed, has an excellent mood:

---

281 Carl Sandburg, Good Morning, America, New York, 1928, p.6.

282 Whitman, Leaves, p.118. For Whitman's doctrine of self-identification with Christ see pp.68-69.



Body of Jesus taken down from the  
cross

Carved in ivory by a lover of Christ,  
It is a child's handful you are here,  
The breadth of a man's finger,  
And this ivory loin cloth  
Speaks an interspersal in the day's  
work,  
The carver's prayer and whim  
And Christ-love.<sup>283</sup>

In another poem written, according to his own notation, on Christmas Day 1917, Sandburg has this line: "Jesus in an Illinois barn early this morning, the baby Jesus...in flannels..."<sup>284</sup> In still another he asks:

Did I see a crucifix in your eyes  
and nails and Roman soldiers  
and a dusk Golgotha?<sup>285</sup>

He writes of the "Christ face," of "the hands of God washing something, feet of God walking somewhere,"<sup>286</sup> and of the love Jesus had for "the sunsets on Galilee."<sup>287</sup>

<sup>283</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.101.

<sup>284</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.239. The title of the poem is "Rusty Crimson."

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., p.42, from "Crimson Changes People."

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., pp.68 and 249. The titles of the poems are "Brass Keys" and "Night's Nothing Again," respectively.

<sup>287</sup> Sandburg, America, p.171, from "Epistle."



Whitman, in 1865, had written:

Young man I think I know you--I  
 think this face is the face of the  
 Christ himself,  
 Dead and divine and brother of all,  
 and here again he lies.<sup>288</sup>

throughout his poetry expressions indicative of intimacy with God occur; "the hand of God is the promise of my own," "the spirit of God is the brother of my own," "the beautiful gentle God," "the great Camerado," all appearing in "Song of Myself."<sup>289</sup>

To Sandburg, God is both healer and avenger. He suggests

Let us look on  
 And listen in  
 On God's great workshop  
 Of stars...and eggs...<sup>290</sup>

in parallelism with Whitman who wrote "that all things of the universe are perfect miracles, each as profound as any."<sup>291</sup>

In attempting a description of approaching darkness in a valley, Sandburg declares:

---

<sup>288</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.259, from "A Sight in Camp in the Day-break Gray and Dim."

<sup>289</sup>Ibid., pp.27,54,70, respectively.

<sup>290</sup>Sandburg, America, p.27, a selection from the title poem.

<sup>291</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.19, from "Starting from Pennanok."



I was there, I saw that hour, I  
know God had grand intentions  
about it.<sup>292</sup>

Whitman before him had penned these lines:

Each is not for its own sake,  
I say the whole earth and all the  
stars in the sky are for re-  
ligion's sake.<sup>293</sup>

Sandburg's unsuccessful endeavor to describe the Grand Canyon in "Many Hats" caused him to wonder and discuss God's connection with this natural phenomenon.<sup>294</sup> His predecessor, however, had answered the question for himself and his readers in this way:

Was somebody asking to see the soul?  
See, your own shape and countenance,  
persons, substances, beasts, the  
trees, the running rivers, the rocks  
and sands.<sup>295</sup>

The World War led Sandburg to write "The Four Brothers," in which are stanzas depicting the ruthlessness of God:

<sup>292</sup> Sandburg, America, p.32, from "Moist Moon People."

<sup>293</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.16, from "Starting from Paumanok."

<sup>294</sup> Sandburg, America, pp.242-251.

<sup>295</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.19, from "Starting from Paumanok."



God takes one year for a job.  
 God takes ten years or a million.  
 God knows when a doom is written.<sup>296</sup>

Out of the wild finger-writing north  
 and south, east and west, over  
 the blood-crossed, blood-dusty  
 ball of earth,  
 Out of it all a God who knows is  
 sweeping clean  
 Out of it all a God who sees and  
 pierces through, is breaking  
 and cleaning out an old thousand  
 years, is making ready for a new  
 thousand years.<sup>297</sup>

Nowhere in Whitman's poetry does such an attitude appear. On the contrary, he writes:

Why should I wish to see God better  
 than this day?  
 I see something of God each hour of  
 the twenty-four, and each moment  
 then,  
 In the faces of men and women I see  
 God, and in my own face in the glass,  
 I find letters from God dropt in the  
 street, and every one is sign'd by  
 God's name,  
 And I leave them where they are, for  
 I know that wheresoe'er I go  
 Others will punctually come for ever  
 and ever.<sup>298</sup>

Indeed, Sandburg's attitude toward religion seems somewhat superficial when compared with the buoyant, yet awed, conception

296 Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.145.

297 Ibid., p.147.

298 Whitman, Leaves, pp.73-74, from "Song of Myself."



of Whitman who wrote of "walking the old hills of Judaea with the beautiful gentle God by my side," of "taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah," and of the "universal God."<sup>299</sup>

He declared

I hear and behold God in every object,  
yet understand God not in the least,  
Nor do I understand who there can be  
more wonderful than myself.<sup>300</sup>

Both, however, are subject to all the faith and doubt of the average person concerning immortality. Both recognize death as the ultimate end and yet, though moments of doubt do appear, they sincerely believe in eternal life. Whitman exults that he can "show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death" and asks "how can the real body ever die and be buried?"<sup>301</sup> Confidently he declares:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is  
certain,  
The Lord will be there and wait till  
I come on perfect terms,  
The great Camerado, the lover true  
for whom I pine will be there.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp. 54, 63, 392.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., pp. 18 and 19.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 70.



The section entitled "Whispers of Heavenly Death" is his Leaves of Grass is the epitome of his belief in life after death,<sup>303</sup> but none of his poems here equals the exquisite hymn to death found in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."<sup>304</sup>

Sandburg's famous poem, "Cool Tombs," expresses his feeling, like that of Whitman, that death is the bringer of peace and rest.

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled  
into the tombs, he forgot the  
copperheads and the assassin  
• • . in the dust, in the cool  
tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought  
of con men and Wall Street, cash  
and collateral turned ashes . . .  
. in the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar,  
sweet as a red haw in November or  
a pawpaw in May, did she wonder?  
does she remember? • • . in the  
dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying  
clothes and groceries, cheering  
a hero or throwing confetti and  
blowing tin horns . . . tell me  
if the lovers are losers . . .  
tell me if any get more than the  
lovers . . . in the dust . . .  
in the cool tombs.<sup>305</sup>

Again he writes:

<sup>303</sup> Whitman, Leaves, pp. 369-378.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., pp. 281-282.

<sup>305</sup> Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p. 120.



Gather the stars if you wish it so.  
 Gather the songs and keep them.  
 Gather the faces of women.  
 Gather for keeping years and years.

And then . . .  
 Loosen your hands, let go and say  
 good-by.

Let the stars and songs go.  
 Let the faces and years go.  
 Loosen your hands and say good-by.<sup>306</sup>

Both poets, too, compare death to a sleep. Whitman writes, "The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,"<sup>307</sup> and Sandburg declares that

Death is a nurse mother with big arms:  
 'Twon't hurt you at all; it's your  
 time now; you just need a long sleep,  
 child; what have you had anyhow better  
 than sleep?<sup>308</sup>

Uncertainties occasionally appear in the productions of these poets. Whitman, in spite of his optimism, wondered if perhaps "identity beyond the grave is beautiful fable only."<sup>309</sup> and composes such a poem as "Yet, Yet De Downcast Hours," the first stanza of which reads:

<sup>306</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.123, from "Stars, Faces, Songs."

<sup>307</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.37.

<sup>308</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.60.

<sup>309</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.100.



Yet, yet, ye downcast hours, I  
 I know ye also,  
 Weights of lead, how ye clog and  
 cling at my ankles,  
 Earth to a chamber of mourning  
 turns--I hear the o'erweening,  
 mocking voice,  
Matter is conquerer--matter, triumphant only, continues onward. <sup>310</sup>

Sandburg, in the Whitmanic manner, asks:

How can I taste with my tongue a  
 tongueless God?  
 How can I touch with my fingers a  
 fingerless God?  
 How can I hear with my ears an  
 earless God?  
 Or smell of a God gone noseless long  
 ago?  
 Or look on a God who never needs  
 eyes for looking? <sup>311</sup>

And again he wonders "Who is God and why? who am I and why?" <sup>312</sup>

#### C. Sex

Whitman has been called indecent by his readers; Sandburg has been labeled brutal. True as these accusations may be,

<sup>310</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.372.

<sup>311</sup> Sandburg, Slabs, p.71.

<sup>312</sup> Sandburg, America, p.250.



their frankness concerning sex is admirable. The bulwark of the former's poetry is built upon sex in all its relationships. The latter's verse leaves us with the impression of superficiality; the reader feels that Sandburg's heart is not deeply concerned with such matters. Both poets, however, write of sex because it is a part of our American life, but just what resemblance there is between the two writers must be determined here.

Similar thought is found in a number of their poems though the externals differ. Whitman's excellent poem, "Once I Pass'd through a Populous City," reads:

Once I pass'd through a populous city  
 imprinting my brain for future  
 use with its shows, architecture,  
 customs, traditions,  
 Yet now of all that city I remember  
 only a woman I casually met there  
 who detained me for love of me,  
 Day by day and night by night we  
 were together--all else has  
 long been forgotten by me,  
 I remember I say only that woman who  
 passionately clung to me,  
 Again we wander, we love, we separate  
 again,  
 Again she holds me by the hand, I  
 must not go,  
 I see her close beside me with silent  
 lips sad and tremulous.<sup>313</sup>

Sandburg wrote:

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<sup>313</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.93.



"I knew a real man once," says Agatha  
in the splendor of a shagbark  
hickory tree.

Did a man touch his lips to Agatha?  
Did a man hold her in his arms?  
Did a man only look at her and  
pass by?

Agatha, far past forty in a splendor  
of remembrance, says, "I knew a  
real man once."<sup>314</sup>

As early as 1860 Whitman dealt frankly and openly with the prostitute, bringing harsh criticisms upon himself. In "Native Moments" he averred:

O you shunn'd persons, I at least do  
not shun you,  
I come forthwith in your midst, I  
will be your poet,  
I will be more to you than to any  
of the rest.<sup>315</sup>

Then too, in extremely modern fashion, he wrote a short poem entitled "To a Common Prostitute," for he considered her a part of American life and he felt it his duty to celebrate all phases of that life. The poem reads:

Be composed--be at ease with me--  
I am Walt Whitman, liberal and  
lusty as Nature,

---

<sup>314</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.208, from "Plaster."

<sup>315</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.93.



Not till the sun excludes you do  
 I exclude you,  
 Not till the waters refuse to glisten  
 for you and the leaves to rustle  
 for you, do my words refuse to  
 glisten and rustle for you.

My girl I appoint with you an appointment,  
 and I charge you that you make  
 preparation to be worthy to meet  
 me,

And I charge you that you be patient  
 perfect till I come.

Till then I salute you with a sig-  
 nificant look that you do not  
 forget me.<sup>316</sup>

Sandburg, too, writes of the prostitute in a similar  
 fashion, although he does make her seem more human to the rea-  
 der:

There is a woman on Michigan  
 Boulevard keeps a parrot and  
 goldfish and two white mice.

She used to keep a houseful  
 of girls in kimonos and three  
 pushbuttons on the front door.

Now she is alone with a parrot  
 and goldfish and two white mice  
 ...but these are some of her  
 thoughts:

The love of a soldier on furlough  
 or a sailor on shore leave  
 burns with a bonfire red and  
 saffron.

The love of an emigrant workman

---

<sup>316</sup>Whitman, Leaves, p.324.



whose wife is a thousand miles  
away burns with a blue smoke.

The love of a young man whose  
sweetheart married an older man  
for money burns with a sputtering  
uncertain flame.

And there is a love...one in a  
thousand...burns clean and is  
gone leaving a white ash...

And this is the thought she never  
explains to the parrot and goldfish  
and two white mice. 317

Nothing could be more typically Whitman than the poem,  
"Haze," by Sandburg which follows:

I don't care who you are, man:  
I know a woman is looking for you  
and her soul is a corn-tassel  
kissing a south-west wind ....

I don't care who you are, man:  
I know sons and daughters looking  
for you  
And they are gray dust working  
toward star paths  
And you see them from a garret  
window when you laugh  
At your luck and murmur, "I don't  
care."

I don't care who you are, woman:  
I know a man is looking for you  
And his soul is a south-west wind  
kissing a corn-tassel ....

I don't care who you are, woman:

---

317 Sandburg, Smoke, p.218. The title of the poem is "White Ash."



I know sons and daughters looking  
for you  
And they are next year's wheat or  
the year after hidden in the  
dark and loam. 318

Undoubtedly, Sandburg received his inspiration for these lines from the "Children of Adam" section of Leaves of Grass. 319 Parenthood seemed sacred to Whitman, and Sandburg himself has a long poem entitled "Harak, Harsk," in which he describes the time prior to the baby's birth and the night of birth itself. 320

Love intrigued these two poets with Whitman writing these lines taken from his "The Mystic Trumpeter":

Love, that is pulse of all, the  
sustenance and the pang,  
The heart of man and woman all  
for love,  
No other theme but love--knitting,  
enclosing, all-diffusing love. 321

But Sandburg not to be outdone by his forerunner, wonders about love's mysteries in this excerpt from "Brass Keys":

... and why does love ask nothing  
and give all? and why is love rare

---

318 Sandburg, Smoke, pp. 229-230.

319 See Whitman, Leaves, pp. 77-94.

320 Sandburg, Slabs, pp. 51-52.

321 Whitman, Leaves, p. 390.



as a tailed comet shaking guesses  
out of men at telescopes ten feet  
long? why does the mystery sit with  
its chin on the lean forearm of  
women in gray eyes and women in  
hazel eyes? 322

That both are keenly interested in this phase of life  
seems obvious, but the matter is much more vital to Whitman  
than to Sandburg.

#### D. Verse Technique

Whitman expressed his theory of poetic form in his "Song  
of the Answerer" of 1855 when he said:

All this time and at all times wait  
the words of true poems,  
The words of true poems do not merely  
please,  
The true poets are not followers of  
beauty but the august masters  
of beauty;  
The greatness of sons is the exuding  
of the greatness of mothers and  
fathers,  
The words of true poems are the  
tuft and final applause of science.

Divine instinct, breadth of vision,  
the law of reason, health, rude-  
ness of body, withdrawnness,  
Gayety, sun-tan, air-sweetness,

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322 Sandburg, Smoke, p. 68.



such are some of the words of poems.<sup>323</sup>

He declared too in his preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass that "the great poets are also to be known by the absence in them of tricks, and by the justification of perfect personal candor."<sup>324</sup>

In 1961 Sandburg defended his own poetic theory in a little poem "Style":

Style--go ahead talking about style.  
You can tell where a man gets his  
style just as you can tell  
where Pavlova got her legs or  
Ty Cobb his batting eye.

Go on talking.  
Only don't take my style away.  
It's my face.  
Maybe no good  
but anyway, my face.  
I talk with it, I sing with it, I  
see, taste and feel with it,  
I know why I want to keep it.

Kill my style  
and you break Pavlova's legs,  
and you blind Ty Cobb's  
batting eye.<sup>325</sup>

Direct comparison of Sandburg's five volumes with Whitman's single volume discloses amazing similarity in verse

323 Whitman, Leaves, p.143.

324 Ibid., p.501.

325 Sandburg, Chicago, p.51.



technique. Reiteration, little or no rhyme, slang, epithets, catalogues characterize their work. Few "run-on" lines occur in the verse of either poet; a thought is usually compressed into one line.

Perhaps the volume containing Sandburg's most characteristic poetry, his finest and his worst, is Smoke and Steel, published in 1921. A perusal of its title poem reveals frequent employment of phrases in parallel structure as in the first three lines:

Smoke of the fields in spring is one,  
Smoke of the leaves in autumn another.  
Smoke of a steel-mill roof or a  
battle-ship funnel,.... 326

Or examine the parallelisms of phrases and clauses in his poem "Night Movement--New York":

In the night, when the sea-winds  
take the city in their arms,  
And cool the loud streets that kept  
their dust noon and afternoon;  
In the night, when the sea-birds  
call to the lights of the city,  
The lights that cut on the skyline  
their name of a city;  
In the night, when the trains and  
wagons start from a long way off  
For the city where the people ask  
bread and want letters;

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326 Sandburg, Smoke, p.3.



In the night the city lives too--  
 the day is not at all.  
 In the night there are dancers  
 dancing and singers singing,  
 And the sailors and soldiers look  
 for numbers on doors.  
 In the night the sea-winds take the  
 city in their arms.<sup>327</sup>

A third example of such construction is found in the short poem "Stars, Songs, Faces":

Gather the stars if you wish it so.  
 Gather the songs and keep them.  
 Gather the faces of women.  
 Gather for keeping years and years.  
 And then . . .  
 Loosen your hands, let go and say  
 good-by.  
 Let the stars and songs go.  
 Let the faces and years go.  
 Loosen your hands and say good-  
 by.<sup>328</sup>

In one of Whitman's finer poems, "Prayer of Columbus," the same type of poetic arrangement is employed:

Thou knowest my years entire, my life,  
 My long and crowded life of active  
 work, not adoration merely;  
 Thou knowest the prayers and vigils  
 of my youth,  
 Thou knowest my manhood's solemn  
 and visionary meditations,

<sup>327</sup> Sandburg, Smoke, p.183.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p.123.



Thou knowest how before I commenced  
 I devoted all to come to Thee,  
 Thou knowest I have in age ratified  
 all those vows and strictly  
 kept them.  
 Thou knowest I have not once lost  
 nor faith nor ecstasy in Thee,  
 In shackles, prison'd, in disgrace,  
 repining not,  
 Accepting all from Thee, as duly  
 come from Thee. 329

In a few lines from his "By Blue Ontario's Shore" occurs the use of clauses in parallel structure:

I will see if I am not as majestic  
 as they,  
 I will see if I am not as subtle  
 and real as they,  
 I will see if I am to be less generous  
 than they,  
 I will see if I have no meaning,  
 while the houses and ships have  
 meaning,  
 I will see if the fishes and birds  
 are to be enough for themselves,  
 and I am not enough for myself. 330

Numerous illustrations of this type of verse-writing might be selected from both writers but these selections indicate that Sandburg probably was affected, to a certain degree at least, by this unusual feature in Whitman.

Both use the long line, a characteristic less common to other poets. The longest line in Whitman appears in his

329 Whitman, Leaves, p.352.

330 Ibid., p.298.



"Salut au Monde!" and Sandburg's longest lines appear in his "Good Morning, America."<sup>331</sup>

Since Sandburg and Whitman were interested in creating new or unusual effects, their disregard for rhyme is not strange. Both desired free range for their thoughts, so that any poetic restrictions would have been entirely foreign to their purpose.

Their aim as poets, to present America as they saw it, led Whitman and Sandburg to become keenly interested in words. The former in his An American Primer pleaded for a language wholly American, not English, which would employ terms used in the nation's industries and social interests.<sup>332</sup> Whitman once wrote, "I know my words are weapons full of danger, full of death,"<sup>333</sup> and Sandburg has written an excellent little poem which he calls "Primer Lesson":

Look out how you use proud words.  
 When you let proud words go, it  
     is not easy to call them back.  
 They wear long boots, hard boots;  
     they walk off proud; they can't  
     hear you calling--  
 Look out how you use proud words.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> See Whitman's Leaves, p.118 and Sandburg's America, pp.3-27.

<sup>332</sup> See Whitman's Primer.

<sup>333</sup> Whitman, Leaves, p.271, from "As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado."

<sup>334</sup> Sandburg, Slabs, p.66.



Both Whitman and Sandburg employed slang most effectively. The former uses such words as "stuck up," "old top-knot," "hankering," "fancy-man," "duds," all of which appear in "Song of Myself"; Sandburg, not to be outdone uses such terms as "hairy, hankering," "slant-head," "moniker," "galoots," all from his volume Smoke and Steel. The latter's use of slang words and phrases is too often carried to excess so that they sometimes lose their power and become dawdling.

Whitman's extensive employment of the catalogue, illustrated in his familiar "Song of Myself,"<sup>335</sup> formed for him, however unsuccessful it may have been, a medium for the presentation of the remarkable vastness of all the aspects of our nation. Sandburg makes use of the same method and fails in a similar fashion. Wishing to differ in some respect from his predecessor who listed the animals of America,<sup>336</sup> he catalogues the flowers.<sup>337</sup> Each of Sandburg's volumes has a great deal of this listing to create, as did Whitman, the illusion of grandeur and extensiveness.

Sandburg's poems must be divided necessarily into two types: the lyric and the realistic. It is only in the latter that few "run-on" lines occur. Each line comprises a complete sentence; the thought is not carried over. This style was

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335 Whitman, Leaves, pp. 24-76.

336 See ibid., p. 53.

337 See Sandburg's America, pp. 8-9.



developed to its final degree by Whitman in his Leaves of Grass, from which Sandburg probably received his inspiration. Examination of the realistic poems in the five volumes of poetry published by Sandburg discloses ample illustrations for this point. Striking examples of poems following this style are the title poems "Smoke and Steel" and "Good Morning, America."

#### IV

##### Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter, Part I, attempts to show that American critics have directly and indirectly compared and contrasted Whitman and Sandburg from 1918 to 1933, during which time their reviews appeared. Their opinions varied, of course, from the assertion by Louis Untermeyer that Sandburg showed marked resemblance to Whitman both in style and content to Harry Hansen's refusal to see very much connection between the two poets. The majority, fifteen of the nineteen critics considered, however, expressed firm belief that Sandburg had his roots in Whitman.

The four critics who made no connection between these two poets included Harry Hansen, Mark and Carl Van Doren, Harriet Monroe, T. K. Whipple, and Alfred Kreymborg. Hansen, although admitting that Sandburg used Whitmanic catalogues, declared



that this poet was not even derivative of his predecessor in spite of his early reading of Whitman. Even though the Van Doren brothers made no mention of Whitman's name, they gave Sandburg certain characteristics--love of humanity, range of sympathies, use of common words--which have been generally recognized to be Whitman's. Harriet Monroe's discussion of Sandburg's art included no direct comparison with Whitman, but her references to the lyrics, refrains, and language of the contemporary poet were applicable to Whitman. T. K. Whipple, one of the foremost modern critics, severely criticized Sandburg whose poetry seemed to him seldom finished, and averred that since this poet was a skeptic he could not be a mystic as Whitman was.

None of these critics, however, took particular passages from the two poets in order to determine exact parallelisms, if such existed. Some quoted excerpts from Sandburg which were in the general Whitmanic vein, but quotations from Whitman were not included.

That Sandburg was familiar with Whitman during the formative years of his life has been definitely proved by his former instructor, Philip Green Wright, who declared that the poet absorbed everything he read. Sandburg's own introduction to the volume of Whitman's poem published by the Modern Library indicates complete familiarity with Leaves of Grass, in which he found masterpieces of poetry. High praise this poet gave the verse, proclaiming Whitman the single American figure who



might be placed along side Shakespeare, Dante, and Homer.

Direct comparison of the poetry of Whitman and Sandburg discloses parallels definitely indicating an undisputable likeness in their style and content. Both poets portrayed America as an agricultural and industrial nation. Whitman discusses the glaring faults of democracy in his prose volume, Democratic Vistas and Other Papers, but very little of this disapproval appears in his poetry. Sandburg's verse, on the other hand, abounds with bitter invectives against the injustices dealt out by the rich upon the poor. Both poets, however, believe that America's salvation lies in its working class, so that they celebrate, in a high fashion, the ordinary laborer.

The subject of war furnished these poets with material for many of their poems. Both had had direct contact with the horrors of warfare and they do not hesitate to describe its seamier side. Their satirical poems, "A Boston Ballad" and "And So To-day," contain arresting descriptions of skeleton armies called from their graves by modern military pageantry. Bitterly opposed to war, the "Drum-Taps" of Whitman and the "War Poems" of Sandburg stand as monuments of warning to Americans of to-day.

Both poets look upon Abraham Lincoln as a great man whose life was tragically shortened by an assassin's bullet, for which reason Whitman devoted an entire section in his Leaves of Grass to poems concerning him and Sandburg has made numerous references to him in his own verse and prose.



International brotherhood is the dream of both Whitman and Sandburg, as evidenced in their longer poems, "Passage to India" and "The Four Brothers."

Closely allied to this doctrine is Whitman's passionate belief in his ability to assume the identities of other persons, as manifested in "Song of Myself." Sandburg only occasionally adopts this tactic, and it is indeed obvious to the reader that this assumption is not a vital part of his verse, as in Whitman's case.

Perhaps the greatest similarity between these two versifiers lies in their attitude toward religion. Their greatest ambition is to make God and Christ understandable and human to the common people. Sandburg's God, however, as exemplified in "The Four Brothers," is often crude and ruthless but nowhere is Whitman's God anything but kind and gentle. Whitman's assumption of the Sacred identity, however, never appears in Sandburg's verse. Nature to both is the supreme manifestation of true religion. Death holds no terror for either of them, but brings instead sleep, peace, and rest.

Like everyone else, these poets experience moments of doubt, but their natural optimism never permits lengthy periods of pessimism concerning religion.

Whitman and Sandburg, sincerely concerned with all phases of life, do not hesitate in frank, open treatment of sex. The lowest type of person is worthy of their pen so that the prostitute receives her consideration. Parenthood is celebrated



by them, although Sandburg's verse has none of the graphic descriptions found in the "Children of Adam" section of Leaves of Grass. Careful examination indicates, however, that sex is much more a vital part of Whitman's poetry than it is of Sandburg's.

To turn now from content to style, marked similarities between these poets become apparent. Both are forced to defend their style against critics. Their verse technique leaves no doubt in the reader's mind concerning the source of Sandburg's verse. Parallel structure of words, phrases, and clauses, reiteration, no rhyme, slang, catalogues, no "run-on" lines characterize their work.

Here has been presented the evidence which may be examined to determine the relationship of Sandburg with Whitman. That the former was deeply impressed by his reading of the good gray poet seems evident, and it is apparent that Sandburg's general philosophy of life, as well as his form, is akin to that of Whitman. During the process of the investigation made by the writer of this thesis, however, it became more and more apparent that Sandburg developed his own individual technique of content and style far beyond that of his predecessor.



## Appendix and Bibliography



Appendix A

Charles Scribner's Sons  
Publishers  
597 Fifth Avenue, New York

October 17, 1935

Dear Miss Haught:

In reply to your inquiry, I am writing to say that I, in common with most critics and historians of literature, regard Walt Whitman as a very important factor in American literature, almost the first truly American figure in that literature and one of its most representative voices. Roughly speaking, I should say that the three most important, as well as most American, individuals produced by this country are Emerson, Lincoln and Whitman.

I think the influence of Whitman upon contemporary poetry has been very great, more especially in relation to substance and point of view, perhaps, than to manner and style. I have never written any large amount of vers libre but I think that a great deal of my poetry has its spiritual roots in Whitman, though the form which it takes is so different.

I'm glad to give you permission to include my reply in your thesis, and I thank you for your interest.

Yours very truly,

John Hall Wheelock (signed)



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